ABSTRACT

# The Problem of Tyranny and Philosophy in the Thought of Plato and Nietzsche

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An ancient prejudice against philosophy and philosophers was that they were somehow associated with tyrants or encouraged tyranny. Was there something to this accusation against philosophy as politically dangerous? The relationship between tyranny and philosophy is investigated with special attention to classical sources--chiefly Plato--and especially the interpretation of these sources in the political thought of Nietzsche. By putting Nietzsche in dialogue with Leo Strauss on the problem of the relationship of philosophy to tyranny, and on the reading of classical political thought more generally, the thesis aims to discover the origin of the aforementioned charge against philosophers. A case is made for why the charge or accusation is in large part legitimate. Much of the body of the thesis consists of a reading of Plato, Pindar, and the historical and prehistoric record for an understanding of the political origin and definition of ancient Greek aristocracy and of aristocratic regimes more generally: the relationship of the emergence of tyrannical regimes and philosophical schools out of declining aristocratic polities is investigated in the writings of Plato and Nietzsche with special attention to the idea of nature in classical political philosophy.

# THE PROBLEM OF TYRANNY AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE THOUGHT OF PLATO AND NIETZSCHE

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by

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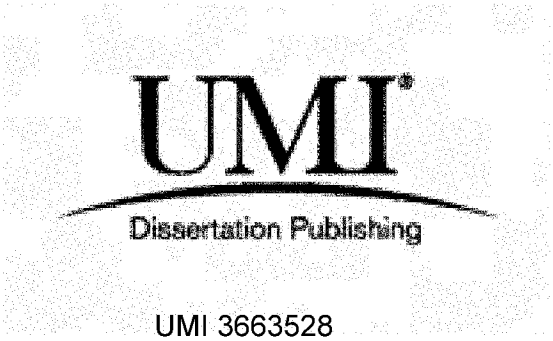
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Finally I would like to thank my family Bernard, Aurelia, and Dan for their love and support.

*I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Aurelia and Bernard Alamariu*

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BGE: Nietzsche, F. *Beyond Good and Evil,* trans. Walter Kaufmann Vintage Press 1999; trans. Ian Johnston, electronic edition: http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/nietzsche/beyondgoodandevil_tofc.htm

GB: Frazer, James George, Sir. *The Golden Bough.* New York: Macmillan, 1922; Bartleby.com, 2000

GM: Nietzsche, F. *Genealogy of Morals,* trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale, Vintage Books 1989; and trans. Ian Johnston electronic edition: http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/nietzsche/genealogytofc.htm

GS: Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science* trans. Walter Kaufmann Random House 1991; trans. Thomas Common, Digireads Press 2009

IPP: Strauss, Leo. *Introduction to Political Philosophy* ed. Hilail Gildin Wayne State 1989

NRH: Strauss, Leo. *Natural Right and History.* University of Chicago, 1953

OT: Strauss, Leo. *On Tyranny: Including the Strauss-Kojeve Correspondence.* ed. Gourevitch U. of Chicago 2000

SCR: Strauss, Leo. *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* U. of Chicago Press 1997

SPPP: Strauss Leo, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy.* University of Chicago, 1983

TCM: Strauss, Leo. *The City and Man.* U. of Chicago 1978

TWI: Nietzsche, F. *Twilight of the Idols* trans. Walter Kaufmann Penguin Press 1977 and trans. R.J. Hollingdale Penguin Press 1990

*Translations from the Greek, whenever they have been used, have often been changed considerably by me for greater clarity.*

## INTRODUCTION

*...You put to death Socrates the sophist, fellow citizens, because he was shown to have been the teacher of Critias, one of the Thirty [Tyrants] who put down the democracy...*
—Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*

*Tell my friends and companions that I have done nothing weak or unworthy of philosophy*
—message sent to the Academy by Hermias tyrant of Atarneus, upon his execution

*That is the turbulent and uncanny thing about Greek history...With the Greeks, things go forward swiftly, but also as swiftly downwards...What took place with the Greeks (that each great thinker, believing he possessed absolute truth, became a tyrant, so that Greek intellectual history has had the violent, rash, and dangerous character evident in its political history) was not exhausted with them...*
—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human all too Human,* "Tyrants of the Spirit"

### *I. The Problem of Tyranny*

What is tyranny? On one hand this question seems natural to political life and has accordingly been asked and answered *almost* as long as political thinking has existed. But in the tradition of political philosophy, and especially in its beginnings, it becomes a vital concern, almost a fixation. At the very birth, not of "political thought," but of political philosophy, if not of philosophy itself, stands the gruesome and seductive person of the tyrant as an $x$ that must be somehow condemned with rhetoric, dissolved in argument, or papered over with sophistries. Among the early Socratics in particular this question assumes a menacing significance and is treated with special urgency: the descriptions of Plato and Aristotle still remain perhaps the most famous treatments. But why does early political philosophy show such an intense interest in *this* problem?

Scholarship on tyranny in the 20th century has, for many reasons, ignored this last question. To understand this apparently casual omission, I look briefly at the three principal ways in which the (relatively recent) literature has tended to treat the problem of ancient tyranny. These three ways correspond roughly to three scholarly disciplines, of the historian, the political scientist, and the political philosopher, although there is obviously some overlap, especially between the last two. This will also serve as a general introduction to the origin of the problem I plan to treat in my dissertation.

Modern historians have for the most part treated the question of "what is tyranny" in the predictable ways: tyranny is reduced to the problem of its emergence; and in particular the focus is on the impersonal and "historical" forces or trends that are to account for its emergence.[1] The three trends most often invoked have been: economic developments, innovations in military organization, and sociological changes peculiar to the Greek world. The economic argument, originally based on the mistaken assumption that coinage arrived in the Greek world prior to the rise of tyrants, holds that a growing commercial class in the seventh and sixth centuries nursed resentment against the traditional landed nobility and raised up one of its own as a champion.[2] The argument based on military innovation is generally that the switch from cavalry to hoplite warfare resulted in a power shift to the middle classes (which formed the backbone of the phalanx) and that these in turn, lacking political traditions, again, raised up one of

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[1] For the general outline of this literature review I am indebted to Robert Drews, "The First Tyrants in Greece," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1972), pp. 129-144 an article I cite again below.

[2] Percy Neville Ure, *The Origin of Tyranny* Cambridge 1922

their own against the mounted nobility.[3] Finally, the sociological argument is based on the idea that tyranny was a consequence of ethnic strife between Dorian and non-Dorian populations in the Greek cities.[4]

More perceptive historians have noted that these theories have serious and specific flaws of chronology, etc., and, as should be obvious to anyone remotely familiar with the *ancient* literature, are unconvincing at face value. Ancient sources emphasize the *hubris* and peculiarity of the tyrant; they say nothing about the causes alleged by modern scholars. In modern words the tyrant would be a highly individualistic "egotist," concerned with his own glory and riches, and driven by *philotimia,* by the love of honor. Although "false consciousness" could conceivably be argued even in the case of men like Periander and Clearchus—to the point of parody perhaps—some historians have remained truer to the ancient descriptions, and to the available historical evidence, by focusing on the motivations and methods of the tyrant himself, rather than on impersonal historical "trends." For example Robert Drews, in a brief and excellent article on the first tyrants, has made a strong case that tyranny became a common phenomenon when ambitious, honor-loving individuals, inspired by the example of Lydian and Carian usurpers in Asia Minor, decided to effect *coups* in various Greek cities with the aid of foreign adventurers

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[3] See e.g., Claude Mossé *La Tyrannie dans la Grèce antique* Paris 1969; Drews cites M. Nilsson in a 1929 article for the modern statement of this claim, but in my opinion it is more interesting to note here that both Aristotle, *Politics* IV and more recently Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* Univ. of California Press 2000 (see also, *Warfare and Agriculture in Classical Greece*), consider the shift to heavy infantry as a precondition for middle-class *republican* constitutions; but one could argue perhaps that "tyranny" represented an intermediate stage.

[4] A. Andrewes *The Greek Tyrants* Prometheus 1956; it should be noted that in a very general sense these theories somewhat support the Aristotelian model: the tyrant is the champion of the people against the nobility become arrogant; and indeed, as Drews points out, late 19th century scholarship had the overt intention of supporting the Aristotelian model, albeit in a very simplified version I would add.

and mercenaries equipped with the newly-developed hoplite technology.[5] There is no need to resort to impersonal abstractions and historical "forces": "*philotimia,* the examples of Gyges and Psammetichus, and the availability of hoplite *epikouroi* may suffice to explain the first tyrants in Greece."[6] The point to remember is that in the scholarship that remains most faithful at least to the surface of the ancient sources, the focus is shifted to the tyrant's motivations and his peculiar methods and "role models."

The situation of "tyranny" in political science is more limited than it should be. Modern political scientists have traditionally had little interest in the general subjects of my dissertation: ancient tyranny and its treatment in the ancient literature. There are several important reasons for this. On one hand, the general assumption in the early 20th century, but even after World War II, was that classical tyranny was a thing of the past. Modern phenomena that might be called tyrannies were, and still are, categorized rather as forms of totalitarianism, dictatorship, etc., and classified according to abstract criteria such as "authoritarianism"; as such the modern definition of the tyrant is frequently unlike the ancient—according to one observer, some modern regimes are called "dictatorships" that should rather be called "tyrannies," and some regimes are called "tyrannies" that should rather be called "postconstitutional rule."[7] The analysis of such contemporary political

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[5] Drews also makes a convincing case that currency was invented as a means for the new usurpers to effect a regular payment of precious materials to his mercenaries.

[6] See Drews 1972 (note 1) for the insights summarized in this paragraph. He also cites Berve *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen* Munich 1967 and notes that he "quite rightly reminds us of the seventh and sixth century texts which characterize the tyrant as an egotist lusting after great wealth and power and as the epitome of *hubris.*"

[7] See, e.g., Juan Linz *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* Boulder 2000 for a typical modern approach, although countless similar examples could be noted. For a deterministic (economic)

phenomena is almost always, like the corresponding historical scholarship on ancient tyranny, in terms of impersonal forces, be they economic, sociological, and so on. But the unelaborated assumption is that ancient tyranny belongs to a different historical horizon and that studying it would tell us little about our own situation; and that, in any case, even with the best historical methods, information would necessarily be limited. A similar assumption holds regarding the treatment of tyranny in ancient (or even modern) political philosophy: political scientists assume that what Plato or Machiavelli might have to say about tyranny is colored by an agenda, or is limited by a narrow historical horizon and political situation. Accordingly little more than a formal nod in the name of "historical interest" is ever given either to ancient tyranny as such or to its treatment in traditional political philosophy.

The situation is further confused by the academic treatment of the subject of modern totalitarianism, and whether it is a phenomenon distinct from ancient tyranny. The "classic" modern case for why totalitarianism is a new phenomenon may be found in the work of Hannah Arendt.[8] Totalitarianism is perceived as a novel form of regime based on the twin application of ideology and terror; the former, defined as the "logic of an idea" that unfolds in history as a movement, is understood to be specifically modern in character and unknown to the tradition of classical political philosophy. Arendt emphasizes in this respect the "scientific" character of

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account of the development of modern dictatorship, the standard today is Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* Cambridge 1966; for the latter distinction on the confusion of modern definitions, see Leo Strauss *On Tyranny* 2000

[8] Arendt *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1973

modern ideological tyrannies[9] (or totalitarianisms). Other modern treatments that directly address the possible difference between modern and ancient varieties of tyranny similarly tend to focus on the specifically "scientific" character of modern tyranny, its origin in the attempt to conquer nature.[10] More important even than ideology in constituting modern tyrannies is the institution of the Party, that is, the permanent and aggressive mobilization of society through a one-party state; something unknown in antiquity in practice if not in theory. To this end, modern treatments of tyranny that are especially useful include Samuel Huntingon's *Political Order in Changing Societies,*[11] wherein praetorian regimes with relatively weak basis in society and weak institutions are contrasted to revolutionary regimes of mass society, which tend to have extensive grass-roots penetration of society by a party apparatus. In this respect, however, modern tyranny or totalitarianism is somewhat different in character from ancient tyranny, and the modern totalitarian despot a different type from the ancient tyrant; and while modern totalitarianism may reflect the character of modern science to a certain extent, it is of no explanatory value in

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[9] ibid chapter 13 "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government" p. 468 where the connection to scientific character is explicitly made.

[10] Such, for example, is the recent work by Waller R. Newell, *Tyranny: A New Interpretation* Cambridge University Press, 2013; Newell similarly places the ultimate origins of modern totalitarianism, which he likewise argues is distinct from ancient tyranny, in the modern attempt at a conquest of nature. Insofar as he focuses on the motivation of the tyrant—*the* focus of the ancient approach—Newell makes the case that the modern tyrant is characterized by an overwhelming measure of *thumos,* as opposed to the covetous, lustful ancient tyrant motivated by *eros.* It is not clear, however, that this distinction can fully be made in the case of ancient tyrants. While in this thesis the role of *eros* both for tyrannical and philosophic motivation is treated at length, yet on the other hand one can think of several ancient examples of tyrants—the Spartan general Clearchus, for example—who by far seem possessed by spiritedness rather than lust (see below, Xenophon and Diodorus on Clearchus). It is not clear that this alone is enough to account for the difference between modern and ancient tyrannical types.

[11] Samuel Huntington *Political Order in Changing Societies* Yale U. Press 2006; Linz also addresses Huntington's work in making the case for modern authoritarianism based on mass party mobilization.

understanding the emergence of ancient philosophy, which is the subject that ultimately interests us here.

An attempt, however minor, to restore the power of classical political philosophy, and a major challenge to the way of thinking just described, appeared in 1948 when Leo Strauss published *On Tyranny.* This commentary on Xenophon's *Hiero,* in the present edition [12] published together with a debate (and correspondence) with Alexander Kojève, is also in part the inspiration for this thesis. Very broadly speaking, the attempt was to show that what classical political philosophy had to say about tyranny is still very relevant to our own time—and perhaps that Xenophon described modern tyrannies better, that is, in a more fundamental and *political* sense, than does modern political science, with its new categories or definitions. It is very interesting, then, that the *particular* focus of Strauss' inquiry, as also of Kojève's response, is again the *motivation* and *aim* of the tyrant, the tyrant as a type.[13] This is then in broad agreement with what I would take to be the most advanced and accurate *historical* scholarship on the subject, briefly discussed above. Both agree that the issue at hand is the motivation and the method of the tyrant himself. To take a step back for a moment: it would seem that precisely here, in the study of "tyranny" it is impossible to reduce human agency to an impersonal force or to the *milieu;* the study of "tyranny," more so than any other

[12] Leo Strauss, Alexander Kojève *On Tyranny* U. Chicago 2000

[13] Strauss and Kojève focus on the "desire for recognition," of Hegelian fame. The original and less democratic word would be *philotimia,* love of honor, etc., and the desire to win *kleos,* fame, the motivation of the heroes in the *Iliad.* The idea that this is a universal desire would, I think, have seemed strange to an ancient audience.

political phenomenon perhaps, is not separable from the human actor, in this case the person or persona of the tyrant.

## II. Origin and Statement of Thesis

If then inspired by Strauss one is to turn to classical political philosophy for understanding the problem of tyranny the following rather straightforward and superficial observation could be made. The casual or conventional answer as to why political philosophy had a preoccupation with the problem of tyranny, inspired in part by the historical circumstances of the late 5th century Hellenic world, by the actual rhetoric of the philosophers themselves, by the elaborations of their disciples both ancient and modern, and by simple credulousness, would seem to be the following: tyranny represents a special and critical "disease" of political life. It was, furthermore, a widespread and virulent disease at the time that the first political philosophers began their work. So it is only natural that the Socratics, for example, would be especially concerned with the origin of this disease and would, in a spirit of love for their fellow citizens, give free peoples advice for how to avoid the disaster. Or that they would exhort to a different and more virtuous life those able political men who might be tempted to pursue tyranny.[14] This "answer," already marked in the Platonic corpus, culminates in a particular philosophic genre, highly developed by late Hellenistic and Roman times: the famous exhortation given by the

[14] This is the line, perhaps ironic, taken by Strauss in *On Tyranny*, see especially his response to Voegelin's review, remarks on "post-constitutional" or Caesaristic rule and why ancient political philosophers would not have even mentioned this category, for prudential reasons.

philosopher to the just king, to avoid tyranny and embrace a lawful monarchy of justice.[15]

On closer inspection of the texts, however, it becomes clear this was not the opinion of the cities regarding the relationship between philosophy and tyranny, at least not in the beginnings. Rather the ancient prejudice was instead that philosophy was somehow associated with tyranny as such—perhaps in the sense that tyrants so often seemed to have received part of their education from philosophers. Or perhaps in the sense that both seemed so free, dangerously free, of conventional moral notions and conventional piety—free to the point of criminality. This is part of what made philosophers highly suspect figures at least when they first appeared. The quotation with which we began, from Aeschines' speech *Against Timarchus,* delivered before a large audience, in which he casually refers to how "you put to death Socrates the sophist, fellow citizens, because he was shown to have been the teacher of Critias, one of the Thirty [Tyrants] who put down the democracy," is rather more revealing of what the ancient prejudice was.

That is to say, before political philosophy, or philosophy, became established as a tradition, the answer to the question "what is tyranny" was somewhat different. And it is this pre-philosophical political understanding that I aim to recapture and also elaborate in my dissertation. The connection between philosophy and tyranny at bottom has to do with the necessities of educating the first philosophers. Such an education, *in an era in which philosophy does not exist established as a tradition, that*

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[15] See e.g., Stephen A. Stertz, "Themistius: a Hellenic Philosopher-Statesman in the Christian Roman Empire," *The Classical Journal,* Vol. 71, No. 4 (Apr. - May, 1976), pp. 349-358; although this tradition is well-known, no citation should be necessary; it is connected to the list of imperial virtues. See also Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* 1957 on the development of the king as the "embodied law."

*is, when philosophy is in its beginnings,* necessarily risks the production instead of a tyrant—it depends on encouraging a political orientation that is tyrannical from the point of view of the *polis;* and it trains certain skills and abilities that are "tyrannical." This thesis is fundamentally an attempt to show that there was something true to the ancient prejudice that considered philosophy as suspiciously and fundamentally associated with tyranny.

In this connection, it may be useful to note that there have been a few recent studies published already on the link between reason and tyranny or philosophy and tyranny; these tend to focus, however, predictably on Greek drama—the *Oedipus* cycle has been especially important in such interpretation. Inspired, as is also this dissertation, by Leo Strauss' insights on the fundamental tension between reason and tradition, the philosopher and the ancient city, such studies have looked at the connection between tyranny and reason in terms of a common antagonistic relationship to the past, to tradition and convention; and a countervailing faith in the usurping power of reason to reshape man's relationship to society and the universe.[16]

It is in the work of Nietzsche, however, that we find the most explicit and profound reflections on how philosophy and tyranny are related at their very roots, and on how the philosopher and the tyrant are in fact the same "type." According to Nietzsche *the decline of an aristocratic regime*—the decline in particular of the Greek *polis*—leads to the emergence both of tyranny and of philosophy. An era that gives

[16] For a good example of this see Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "The Tyranny of Reason in the World of the Polis," *The American Political Science Review,* Vol. 82, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 1261-1275

birth to philosophy is necessarily one where the danger of tyranny is ever-present. This Nietzschean idea of the birth of philosophy and tyranny, as twins, out of the spirit of aristocracy is quite strange. In what sense can it be said that "aristocracy" or an aristocratic regime is the precondition for philosophy? And what precisely is the relationship of these to tyranny? A third striking question follows upon these: since both Nietzsche and Strauss, as well as the tradition of political philosophy, agree that philosophy stands or falls by the discovery of the idea of nature and therefore that the discovery of nature is the proximate precondition for the emergence of political philosophy—in what way then does nature emerge as an idea or as a standard out of the aristocratic regime? What, in the end, is the meaning of "nature," of "human nature," at the very beginnings of political philosophy?

This thesis, as a defense of the ancient city's prejudice against philosophy and its criminal associations with tyranny, is therefore also an attempt to find the historical, literary, and philosophical sources, in antiquity, for Nietzsche's striking idea that philosophy and tyranny are somehow radically connected. Such a study then may be of interest, not only to students of the political thought of Nietzsche himself, but also to those concerned with the meaning and origins of aristocracy as a regime, with the relationship of philosophy to political society, with tyranny as such; it may also be of interest to those concerned with the thought of Leo Strauss, in that it represents a possible alternative—Nietzsche's take, or Nietzsche's hypothetical response—to the same subjects that drove Strauss' own investigations.

In fine, then, a provisional version of the thesis will now be stated:

*This thesis is an attempt to show that the aristocratic regime, and aristocratic morality, is the origin of the idea of nature; that, at the point at which a historical aristocracy starts to decline, its defenders, in abstracting and radicalizing the case for aristocracy in the face of its critics, come upon the teaching of nature and the standard of nature in politics. It is precisely this teaching of nature, so corrosive of all convention and all morality, that is politically explosive, and that explains the deep connection between philosophy—the criminal study of nature outside the city and outside the myths and pieties of the regime—and tyranny—the criminal and feral regime of rule outside and above all law and all convention.*

I have now used somewhat poetic or extreme language. This is a consequence of the fact that here, as elsewhere in the thesis, I alternatively adopt the voice of the ancient city—according to which, for example, the study of nature is indeed criminal—or the voice of the author whose case I am making. This is done partly for convenience, but more so for the sake of understanding and making clear ideas that are by necessity very foreign to us. Much of this thesis is devoted to investigating Nietzsche's claims and ideas regarding aristocracy, tyranny, philosophy, and so forth; much of it—for example the chapter on Plato—is an attempt at a "Nietzschean" reading of Plato, as an alternative or answer to Strauss' reading of Plato. It is then important, for the sake of clarity, to state in as matter-of-fact a manner as possible ideas that may often therefore be disturbing or even shocking from a modern point of view.

But if we are to truly understand the ancient city's objection to philosophy, it is important to try, as far as is possible, to tunnel into the worldview of the ancient city and temporarily adopt this worldview for our own. Similarly, if one is to follow Nietzsche's guidance and investigate the roots of the idea of nature in aristocratic regime and ethics, one would do well to make an effort—even if it is ultimately fruitless or at least very difficult—to attempt to conceive of aristocracy as it conceived of itself, that is, before philosophy and before the abstractions inherent in political philosophy. To understand the emergence of philosophy out of the pre-philosophical world one must make an attempt to understand the prephilosophical regime as it understood itself—without the aid of philosophical or of modern notions. Therefore the reader is informed that, throughout this thesis, on account of this very attempt at a "phenomenological" or inner understanding of certain political phenomena, in the course of trying to adopt the ancient city's worldview for our own, premodern and often uncomfortable ideas will be restated in a matter-of-fact manner, without either approbation or condemnation.

The thesis is divided into roughly three parts, in the course of which the same idea is repeated and developed in three different ways. The first part, consisting of the first two chapters, treats the emergence of the standard of nature out of the prephilosophical mind: the first chapter is a brief attempt at a phenomenology of the ancient, indeed prehistoric mind generally, while the second focuses more on the problem of aristocracy and in particular of Greek remote antiquity or pre-history. It is argued and concluded that the enigmatic idea of nature—the necessary precondition, as we are to see, for both philosophy and for tyranny—emerges

uniquely out of the way of life and morality of a certain type of aristocracy. The second part of the thesis, consisting of chapters three and four—roughly on Pindar and on Plato—is an attempt to show, from Greek literature and from philosophy (in particular from the Socratic school) how the standard of nature was elaborated as a defense for the aristocratic regime and how, when radicalized, it explains the connection between the philosopher and the tyrant as types, between the philosophical and tyrannical *orientations toward the city.* It turns out that from the point of view of the ancient city, the difference between the tyrant and the philosopher collapses almost to nothing. Whether this view is ultimately "correct" or not is a different matter; it is surely a limited view; there is inherent value, however, in understanding why the ancient city came to this conclusion, why the ancient prejudice against philosophy existed.

The last part and final chapter of the thesis is on Nietzsche, who presents the most comprehensive and clearest theoretical and historical elaboration of the idea. A new interpretation is given for features of Nietzsche's thought—the brutality of some of his rhetoric, the reason for his turn to "physiology" and the body, his questionable statements on Plato—that should already be familiar to scholars as well as casual readers of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's thought and in particular his rhetoric, his politics, is understood as a response to the crisis caused by the collapse of the Platonic project—the argument is made that Nietzsche saw an extreme response as necessary in his own time because he believed that the possibility for philosophy stood in the balance. Nietzsche, in any case, makes the clearest possible

connection between philosophy and tyranny, and the root or ground of both of these in the aristocratic regime and its character as an attempt to cultivate human nature.

## CHAPTER ONE: BRIEF PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE PREPHILOSOPHICAL POLITICAL LIFE

*Introduction to Chapter One—*

This chapter is a study of the prephilosophic mind out of which the idea of nature first emerged. It is divided in two parts, the first treating the prephilosophical mind generally, the second being a rudimentary attempt at a "phenomenology" of aristocracy or at a prephilosophic understanding of Greek aristocracy. The aim is to show how the idea of nature—and therefore *the* precondition for philosophy—emerges out of aristocratic life or an aristocratic ethos. The origin of this claim is in Nietzsche. Nietzsche's own actual and full elaboration of this claim—that philosophy and also tyranny uniquely emerge out of a certain type of a decaying aristocracy—will be studied in the last chapter of the thesis.

The first claim I seek to establish in this chapter is that the prephilosophic political mind and political society is characterized by a form of primitive and totalitarian *democracy,* provisionally defined here as the undisputed rule and sovereignty of a historically concrete people or tribe through the ubiquity and supremacy of collective ancestral custom. Ancestral custom—*nomos*—is ubiquitous and all-powerful. Therefore it will be argued that one must not confuse the prephilosophic early chieftain or king for anything other than a servant or slave of the convention and of the needs of the collective. It is to be established in the second part of the chapter that the introduction of *a principle* antagonistic to the

fundamental primitive democracy or collectivism is possible only through conquest by a foreign tribe that continues to exist in some sense outside and above the collective of the conquered, and consequently that this is the origin of most if not all aristocracies that have existed.

Accordingly, the second part of this chapter treats the origin of aristocracies and is a rudimentary attempt at a "prephilosophical" understanding of aristocracy, particularly of ancient Greek aristocracy. The claims I try to elaborate here are the following: a) that the Greek world is, from as early as we can tell, stratified into a conquering and a conquered people, an aristocratic element and a "banausic" or serf-like element. And that the conquering or aristocratic caste already contains, from the beginning, certain peculiar institutions that I will later show to bear directly on the problem of tyranny and philosophy—in particular the institution of an independent warrior class composed of youths; b) that these two features of Greek life, namely the top-down imposition of order by a conquering elite and the separate and independent status of the warrior class, is likely what allows for a principle *different* from the fundamental democracy or fundamental collectivism to emerge, albeit one still understood "prephilosophically," i.e., through the prism of myth; c) that this principle consists, not in the preservation of a people or a collective, but in the struggle for individual superiority, understood as a matter of the supremacy of one's "blood," with direct analogy to the animal world, and which is manifested through physical supremacy, vitality, and battle prowess, and in the consequent acquisition of an "undying fame."

It is this principle of aristocratic life or aristocratic morality, as understood in the most primitive and even barbaric sense, that Nietzsche believes is the origin of philosophy. In the following chapters we will see how this standard, in fact the standard of nature, is first elaborated and finally abstracted and radicalized first in Pindar, and later in Plato; Nietzsche's reading of antiquity will thus be considered from various points of view in order to try to understand the substance of the enigmatic and perhaps shocking connection he posits between philosophy and tyranny. In this chapter the method is to look at the "primitive" mind—in particular the Greek mind—as it existed before the emergence of philosophy and tyranny, and to show how these developed in parallel out of certain common features—prephilosophic forms of political organization and prephilosophic forms of understanding the world.

## *I. General Features of the Prephilosophical Political Mind*

### *a) Strauss, Hume, and Nietzsche on Necessity of Study of the Prephilosophic; Terror as Matrix of Prephilosophic Society*

It is not only in Nietzsche that one finds a concern with the elements of the prephilosophical mind out of which philosophy develops. Indeed there has been some recent interest in this topic. It suffices to mention the work of Marcel Gauchet. This latter is in some ways characteristic of contemporary concerns with the

problem of "primitivism," however, in that in his pursuit of a genealogy of modern secularism and modern democracy out of the pre-modern mind, he ends up basing many of his substantive insights on Nietzsche himself, or on Nietzsche through Heidegger.[1] Gauchet does this even while he criticizes Nietzsche perhaps for not going far enough on Nietzschean grounds, and while disagreeing with Nietzsche's political opinions or orientation. Regardless, as to the substance of most contemporary arguments, for understanding one would do well to turn to their ultimate source in Nietzsche and to study Nietzsche himself.

Nietzsche's view may be better understood by first considering the alternative against which Nietzsche argued at some length, and which may be provisionally called the "English" view of the history of morality or religion. Nietzsche challenges this view while at the same time preserving certain of its substantial insights. An important exception to the aforementioned contemporary

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[1] Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World,* Princeton 1999 and *L'Avènement de la démocratie,* Gallimard 2007; see the review by Francis Fukuyama in *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 77, No. 3 (May - Jun., 1998), p. 131, where the reliance on Nietzsche and Heidegger is emphasized, and see Gauchet's own vol. II of Gallimard 2007, *The Crisis of Liberalism,* p. 43 where Nietzsche is at once mentioned as the writer who first predicted the crisis of liberalism and also criticized for not going far enough in ridding himself of a religious orientation. Nietzsche's heirs, Husserl and Heidegger, are similarly criticized for an attempt to recapture the vitality or authenticity of the pre-modern mind. Gauchet seems concerned about neopaganism, or the attempt to return to paganism, as a potential threat to liberal democracy. The political motivation of his project—an overt political project of some kind is very common in almost all contemporary studies of the "premodern" mind—is the preservation of the modern French left-liberal order, a motivation he is quite explicit about. In this connection most relevant is Gauchet's debate with Pierre Manent, as discussed by Warren Breckman, "Democracy between Disenchantment and Political Theology: French Post-Marxism and the Return of Religion," *New German Critique* Duke U. No. 94, (Winter, 2005), pp. 72-105, see especially p. 100-2:

> The history of the disenchantment of the world served as a vehicle for Gauchet to express a generation's disenchantment with its former political commitments...Gauchet's reply [to Manent] had less to do with the relative historical merits of their respective positions than with contemporary politics: "a sober view of democratic development, conducted on the base of a religious genealogy, permits the simultaneous rebuttal of ultra-democratic optimism, blind to the obstacles that lie in its route, and of conservative pessimism, obsessed exclusively by the factors of dissolution and the inviability of an individualist order." ...Here a religious genealogy serves the normalization and stabilization of a liberal democratic order...He directed his argument...against modernist and postmodernist celebrations of paganism...The ideological reorientation of French intellectual life, which began with the rejection of Marxism...melts into the claim for a left-liberal consensus...Gauchet's ambitious book confirmed that "the revolution is over."

studies of the "premodern" mind, which is based on an awareness both of the Nietzschean claims and of its alternatives, may be found in the work of Leo Strauss. Leo Strauss' chapter three from *Natural Right and History,* "The Origin of the Idea of Natural Right," has been called the best interpretation of ancient conventionalism,[2] and contains an accessible and clear explanation for why the study of the prephilosophic mind is important in the first place:

> To understand the problem of natural right one must start, not from the "scientific" understanding of natural things, but from their natural understanding, i.e., from the way in which they present themselves in political life, in action, when they are our business, when we have to make a decision...the first philosopher was the first man who discovered nature. The whole history of philosophy is nothing but the record of the ever repeated attempts to grasp fully what was implied in that crucial discovery which was made by some Greek twenty-six hundred years ago or before. To understand that discovery in however provisional a manner, one must return from the idea of nature to its prephilosophic equivalent.[3]

The beginning of Strauss' chapter may indeed remind one of Nietzsche's and Heidegger's attempts to go back to the very beginning of philosophy and discover the pre-philosophical matrix out of which it emerged. But the language in the passage above does not really hark back to Nietzsche or Heidegger, except in a negative sense; rather, it alludes to an alternative and somewhat older source, namely, the beginning of David Hume's *Natural History of Religion,* which is as follows,

> On the other hand, if, leaving the works of nature, we trace the footsteps of invisible power in the various and contrary events of human life, we are necessarily led into polytheism and to the acknowledgment of several limited and imperfect deities... We may conclude, therefore, that, in all nations, which have embraced polytheism [i.e., the oldest, original and most universal religious ideas], **the first ideas of religion arose not from a contemplation of the works of nature, but from a concern with regard to the events of life, and from the incessant hopes and fears,** which actuate the human mind.[4]

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[2] Vander Waerdt 1994 pg. 277

[3] NRH 81-2

[4] Hume *Natural History of Religion,* section II "Origin of Polytheism"

That Strauss may indeed be alluding to this passage is further supported by the following two considerations. First, in his early work on Spinoza,[5] Strauss points out that Epicurus and Epicurean philosophy in general—the "most important" source of the 17th century criticism of religion—had an explicit and immediate desire or motivating ground in *quelling fear of the gods.* This must be considered not only in light of Hume's reference above to primitive religion being rooted in "incessant fears," but also to his more elaborate statements further on in the same section, to the same effect, that the ground of primitive religion was

> the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, **the terror of death,** the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries. Agitated by hopes and fears of this nature, **especially the latter,** men scrutinize, with a trembling curiosity, the course of future causes, and examine the various and contrary events of human life.

In other words, if we are right in reading these passages from Hume and Strauss together, and take account also of what Strauss wrote regarding the motivating ground of Epicurean philosophy in *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, it is fear, terror, the near-nihilistic experience of a void world that in fact constitutes, at the deepest level, what Strauss dryly calls the "natural understanding" or the prephilosophic understanding of the world "that is our business," and out of which philosophy or the discovery of nature arise, perhaps in opposition. The world of political life, or action and commitment that requires action, at least as it existed before its modification by philosophy and the doctrine of nature, was grounded, maybe, in the fundamental fear or vision of fundamental chaos out of which early paganism or polytheism arose as salutary salves. This view finds more support

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[5] SCR 38-41

when we consider Strauss' words at the end of *City and Man,* where Fustel de Coulanges is mentioned:

> We would have great difficulty in doing justice to this remote or dark side of the city but for the work of men like Fustel de Coulanges above all others who have made us see the city as it primarily understood itself as distinguished from the manner in which it was exhibited by classical philosophy: the holy city in contradistinction to the natural city...the pre-philosophic city...which sees itself as subject and subservient to the divine or looks up to it. Only by beginning at this point will we be open to full impact of the question which is coeval with philosophy although the philosophers do not frequently pronounce it—the question *quid sit deus.*[6]

What is the "remote or dark side" of the prephilosophic city? In this connection note one more piece of evidence that supports the general idea that Strauss is leading the reader to an intimation, not especially discussed openly anywhere, of a connection between the primitive religious imagination and the feeling of *terror.* In *Natural Right and History* in the middle of a discussion on Weber, Strauss makes a case that would appear to back up this provisional interpretation: Weber is presented as a "noble nihilist," whose theory of the distinction between facts and values, which leads to "complete chaos," to an abyss of nihilism, is itself grounded in the realization that commitment to causes or ideals—political life, that "matters to us"—requires religious belief, and that such belief is understood primally as an irrational decision or bridge spanning the fundamental chaos, abyss or meaninglessness of existence.[7] Strauss, with a politic turn, backs away from such serious if not Nietzschean- and Heideggerian-sounding speculations, but the ground is already laid for the suggestion, which Strauss hints at elsewhere as well, that modern historicism, the parallel of ancient conventionalism, which rejects the possibility of philosophy, does so because it is motivated by a vision of "complete

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[6] TCM 240-1

[7] NRH p. 73-6 see end, "let us hasten back from these awful depths to a superficiality..."

chaos" or the abyss out of which only "gods or the gods" can save us. That is, modern radical historicism, the parallel of ancient pagan conventionalism, is understood, like that pre-philosophical conventionalism, to be motivated by the experience of fundamental terrors against which gods or the religious sense arise, "not from a contemplation of nature but from regard to the events of Life, of incessant hopes and fears..."

Thus the Humean view is that the most fundamental experience of the prephilosophic or premodern mind is terror or fear, and that the religious experience that precedes conventions arises out of this matrix of fear. But is this the Straussian view? Or is it more likely that Strauss is here in characteristic fashion drawing out the two alternatives and calling attention to the crucial issue on which Nietzsche and Hume differ? It is precisely on this subject of the relationship of the religious nature to morality that Nietzsche and Hume fundamentally differ. In his own essay on Nietzsche, Strauss quite explicitly contrasts Nietzsche with Hume on this matter:

> The fifth chapter [of *Beyond Good and Evil*]—the central chapter—is the only one whose heading ("Toward the natural history of morality") refers to nature. Could nature be the theme of this chapter or even of the whole second part of the book? ...Nietzsche makes a distinction between nature and life, just as, on another occasion he makes a distinction between nature and "us" (human beings). The opposite of life is death which is or may be no less natural than life. The opposite of the natural is the unnatural: the artificial, the domesticated, the misbegotten, the anti-natural, i.e., the unnatural may very well be alive....When stating the case for an empirical study, a description, of the various moralities Nietzsche states at the same time the case against the possibility of a philosophic ethics, a science of morals which teaches the only true morality. It would seem that he makes higher demands on the student of religion than on the student of morality. This is perhaps the reason why he did not entitle the third chapter "The natural history of religion": Hume had written an essay entitled "The Natural History of Religion."[8]

Here there is again in the words of Strauss a distinction between "nature" and "life" or "nature" and "us," just as in the words of Hume there is a distinction

[8] SPPP p. 182

between conceiving of things from "contemplation of the works of nature" on one hand, and "concern with regard to the events of life, and incessant hopes and fears," for *us,* on the other. Yet, though Strauss himself, in his own voice, echoes this distinction in *Natural Right and History,* here he very explicitly contrasts Nietzsche's position with Hume's. The disagreement between the two thinkers obviously has to do with how they understand religion—including ancient, pagan religion—and the relationship of religion to science on one hand, and to morality on the other. Let us briefly summarize these two different approaches—the "English," and the "Nietzschean"—before proceeding to the demonstration of the main claims made in the introduction to this chapter.

For Hume a natural history of religion is possible because religion, and specifically primitive religion, though it has a root in the passions, nevertheless can be understood rationally, that is, on broadly utilitarian grounds. Action rooted in the passions may itself be "irrational," but it can nevertheless be comprehended rationally. The examples of irrationality that Hume invokes in his essay represent a series of logical mis-steps or errors by early man who, finding himself in a dangerous, confusing world, and living in insecurity and fear for his life, makes entirely wrong but entirely plausible mistakes about the character of natural forces, his relationship to them, and the possibility of assuaging them as they become personalized in the form of gods and demons. This "English view" is much the same as the position of the later James George Frazer, whose monumental work on the elements of the prehistoric and prephilosophical understanding is to be considered

below.[9] In this way of thinking, although the character of early religion is understood as irrational because based on passions, nevertheless these appear somehow to be available to *rational* comprehension, or *calculation,* because ancient man *wanted* much the same things as modern, civilized man. And it is possible to judge the character of religious belief scientifically, as it were, or naturally, that is, reducing it to a calculation comprehensible to scientific reason, even if, at bottom, the original calculation should be based on logical mistakes regarding the character of natural phenomena, and on passionate desires. These desires themselves are available to natural or scientific analysis. Which is to say, an external position may be taken to understanding the character of early religion and therefore of early convention. And so religion itself seems to grow out of morality, perhaps as an idelogical superstructure for moral needs—if only a utilitarian or hedonistic morality.

Nietzsche rejects this vision as "English."[10] As Strauss points out, Nietzsche does not believe in "a science of morals which teaches the only true morality," and this specifically includes rational or utilitarian morality: rather for Nietzsche what is natural is only the *binding* or *burdening* of man to precisely unnatural and unreasonable laws. "Over and against the ruinous permissiveness of anarchism

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[9] Frazer indeed begins his investigations into the character of the primitive mind from an example emphasized by Hume himself regarding the King of the Wood at the Temple of Diana at Aricia: "In the temple of Diana at Aricia near Rome, whoever murdered the present priest was legally entitled to be installed his successor. A very singular institution! For, however barbarous and bloody the common superstitions often are to the laity, they usually turn to the advantage of the holy order." Hume *History* Section IX

[10] Nietzsche BGE 252, Hume (along with Locke) is a "debasement" of philosophy. It is well known that Nietzsche's ire is drawn *especially* toward the English history of morality and English biology, while nevertheless acknowledging that the English psychologists are the only other ones who have approached this crucial problem; see also e.g. GM Prologue 4, 7 and I.1 "These English psychologists, whom we have to thank for the only attempts up to this point to produce a history of the origins of morality—in themselves they serve up to us no small riddle..."

Nietzsche asserts that precisely long lasting obedience to unnatural and unreasonable *nomoi* is the 'moral imperative of nature.' *Physis* calls for *nomoi* while preserving the distinction, nay, opposition of *physis* and *nomos.*"[11] Nietzsche's rejection of a rational morality is based on his rejection of a utilitarian morality; it is precisely the binding of man to arbitrary, even absurd laws, to laws which serve no particular benefit, that is the character of morality. Religion, premodern polytheism then, cannot emerge out of a utilitarian morality as in the model of Hume. Peoples themselves are the result of the founding acts of creative prophets; much as in Rousseau, Nietzsche believes such prophets or founders—legislators in the highest sense—are the origin therefore of *mores* and conventions by which peoples live. In this task the founder uses religion, but the religious experience of such founders, and by extension religious experience in general, is therefore not reducible to calculation of benefit or of self-interest.

In fine, although according to Strauss, it appears that in some limited sense both Nietzsche and Hume agree that the experience of fear or terror is the "original" primitive experience, they differ substantially on how early man responded to this experience. The matter of prephilosophic mind and religion is straightforward for Hume and in general for "English psychologists" because it has a basis in a rational, preservationist, utilitarian morality; but it is a complicated matter for Nietzsche because it cannot be determined by such calculation. Nietzsche, while appreciating the cynicism and the "shoving the *partie honteuse* of our inner world into the

[11] SPPP 183

foreground" of the English psychologists[12] believes they on one hand do not go far enough in revealing the shameful, irrational, and even violent origins of morality; while, on the other hand, they are incapable of understanding the variety in human nature and therefore the heights (and depths) that human nature can reach. This is in part because of their commitment to a utilitarian (and therefore already a democratic) morality, and in part because of their lack of a "historical sense," which makes the English historians of morality incapable of producing accurate genealogies. [13] They assume that premodern men were similar to modern Englishmen in their passions, not seeing that different men desire different things, and in particular that the desire for glory is fundamentally different from the desire for comfort. They therefore misunderstand the prephilosophic mind, believing it to be fundamentally motivated by self-interest, benefit, calculation, comfort, tit-for-tat reciprocity.

What follows is a short genealogy of the idea of nature out of the prephilosophic mind—the fundamental task, at least, which Nietzsche, the "English," and Strauss all agree must be undertaken. Both Nietzsche and the "English" view—in particular the insights of Frazer—must be considered in order to arrive at a more complete view of the ancient mind. The ubiquity of ancestral convention or *nomos,* the religious character of this *nomos,* and the character of primitive society as a fundamental "totalitarian" democracy will be considered in turn.

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[12] GM I.1
[13] GM I.2

b) *prephilosophic ubiquity of ancestral* nomos; *religious character of* nomos

The general feature that Strauss attributes to the pre-philosophical society is the following: the ubiquity, or if one may exaggerate in a manner uncongenial to Strauss, the *totalitarianism* of *nomos,* "custom" or "way" both as explanatory principle of human behavior in general, and as authoritative principle or standard for behavior in one's own tribe. In the example that Strauss gives, "barking and wagging the tail is the way of dogs, menstruation is the way of women, the crazy things done by madmen are the way of madmen, just as not eating pork is the way of Jews and not drinking wine is the way of Moslems."[14] The more general definition that Strauss gives to go along with these examples is that prior to the discovery of nature "no fundamental distinction was made between customs which are always and everywhere the same and customs or ways which differ from tribe to tribe."

The first corollary of this basic definition is that it is not just a kind of "law" or "custom" or "convention" that is in question here, but something far more fundamental and all-encompassing. It has been noted by others that it is a mistranslation and therefore gross misunderstanding to understand *nomos* simply as "law," which is often done. This mistranslation allows for inappropriate comparisons between what is meant by "rule of law" in classical times and in modern times. *Nomos* is a word that encompasses far more than "law" and indeed far more than "convention," a word with vaguely contractarian overtones, mean to us today. Carl Schmitt makes the point that,

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[14] NRH 82-3

As long as the Greek word *nomos* in the often-cited passages from Heraclitus and Pindar is transformed from a spatially concrete, constitutive act of order and orientation—from the *ordo ordinans* into a mere enactment of acts in line with an *ought* and, consistent with the manner of thinking in the positivistic legal system, translated with the word *law*—all disputes about interpretation are hopeless and all philological acumen fruitless. Matters are further complicated by the fact that most philological interpreters obviously have no sense of how totally the word *law* was functionalized by late 19th century jurists into the positivistic legal system of the modern state apparatus, until legality had become merely a weapon used at any given time by those legislating against the part excluded from legislation. In reality the words of Heraclitus and Pindar mean only that all subsequent regulations of a written or unwritten kind derive their power from the inner measure of an original, constitutive act of spatial ordering. This original act is *nomos.* All subsequent developments are either results of and expansions of this act or else redistributions (*anadasmoi*)—either a continuation on the same basis or a disintegration of and departure from the constitutive act of the spatial order established by land-appropriation, the founding of cities, or colonization.[15]

*Nomos* is an all-encompassing primordial act of foundation. It is worth considering the historian Burckhardt's own congruent words on the dignity and power of the ancient meaning of *nomos* as opposed to most modern usages of "law," "convention" and even "constitution":

There was also another sense and another form in which the *polis* regarded itself as an ideal whole, and that is in its *nomos,* a word used to embrace the laws and with them the constitution. *Nomos* is the higher objective power, supreme over all individual existence or will, not satisfied merely to protect a citizen in return for taxes and military service, as in modern times, but aspiring to be the very soul of the whole *polis.* Law and the constitution are hymned in the most sublime phrases as the invention and gift of the gods, as the city's personality, as the guardians and preservers of all virtue. They are the "rulers of the cities," and Demaratus the Spartan seeks to explain to Xerxes that his people fear King Law (*despotes nomos*) more than the Persians fear their Great King. The officials in particular are, as Plato puts it, to be the slaves of the law. The lawgiver therefore appeared as a superhuman being, and the glory of Lycurgus, Solon, Zaleucus and Charondas sheds a reflected light on much later men, so that for instance, as late as about 400 BC the Syracusan law refomer Diocles received heroic honors and even a temple after his death (Diodorus 13.35).[16]

Law or *nomos* retained this character for the city even to the end of the Classical period, and was understood to have an all-pervading power to determine daily life and thought; and even during the convulsions of the Peloponnesian War,

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[15] Schmitt *Nomos of the Earth* 2006 p. 78

[16] Burckhardt 1999 p. 59

with its murderous civil strife between factions, it was understood—at least for the purposes of lip service—that *nomos* as an original constitutive act was something that lay quite outside the self-interest of parties, let alone that of the individual—a permanent "convention" constitutive of the citizen as such, and therefore outside the vagaries of day-to-day political (let alone economic) interests:

> Above all, *nomos* must not pander to the transitory interests and caprices of the individual or of those who happen to be in the majority. It was strongly felt, at least in theory, that old laws should be retained; indeed, customs and manners which were even older than laws, and had perhaps been in force from the very foundation of the city, were recognized as having a vigor of which the laws were only the outward expression. And even inadequate laws, as long as they were strictly observed, seemed a better guarantee of stability than change would be. Alcibiades said as much in the conclusion of his great speech in favor of the expedition to Sicily. In certain states boys had to learn the laws by heart, set to a tune or cadence, not just to fix them in the memory but to ensure that they became unalterable. (The Greek word *nomos* has the double meaning of law and melody.)[17]

These statements on the supremacy of *nomos* or custom receive strong support from a famous primary source, the statement of Herodotus where he quotes Pindar on the matter of the *nomos basileus:*

> I hold it then in every way proved that Cambyses was quite insane; or he would never have set himself to deride religion and custom. For if it were proposed to all nations to choose which seemed best of all customs, each, after examination, would place its own first; so well is each convinced that its own are by far the best. It is not therefore to be supposed that anyone, *except a madman,* would turn such things to ridicule. I will give this one proof among many from which it may be inferred that all men hold this belief about their customs. When Darius was king, he summoned the Greeks who were with him and asked them for what price they would eat their fathers' dead bodies. They answered that there was no price for which they would do it. Then Darius summoned those Indians who are called Callatiae, who eat their parents, and asked them (the Greeks being present and understanding through interpreters what was said) what would make them willing to burn their fathers at death. The Indians cried aloud, that he should not speak of so horrid an act. So firmly rooted are these beliefs; and it is, I think, rightly said in Pindar's poem that custom is lord of all.[18]

It is interesting that one of the few examples of "*nomos*" that Strauss gave in his initial definition included "the crazy things done by madmen are the way of

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[17] Burckhardt 1999 59-60

[18] Herodotus *History* 3.38. My emphasis. For a description on customs differing with respect to drunkenness see the description of the Scythians vs. the Greeks at Plato *Laws* I 637

madmen"; and that he followed this rather strange example with one regarding different religious restrictions on diet. We see now that Herodotus presents his famous example of the *nomos basileus* (concerning religious differences on burial and—diet) after explaining the "mad acts" of the Persian king Cambyses against his subjects: the three examples Herodotus names are one of desecration of graves and two of desecration of temples. Which is to say, according to Herodotus quite explicitly the decisive meaning of custom or *nomos*—as Strauss himself later reveals—has to do more with what today we would casually call the specifically religious dimension of human life. If one can deduce anything from Strauss' strange reference to the "way of madmen," it would be, when compared to Herodotus' own account of Cambyses' complete disregard for *nomos* or "way," that there are certain beings whose *way* is opposed to *way as such,* that there is a *nomos* that is fundamentally anti-*nomos.* Let us leave this speculation behind for a moment. It becomes clear from Herodotus', Schmitt's, and Burckhardt's accounts, that *nomos* refers perhaps to beliefs and laws shrouded in antiquity, the divine, and so on, that regulate behavior regarding everything in daily life—menstruation, copulation, drinking, and so forth.

The power of *nomos* for the prephilosophical mind, its unified and undisputed political and religious power, is vouchsafed by its ancestral origin. As Burckhardt hints already, *nomos* is supreme because it is ancestral; and, as Strauss adds, it is "our own" because it belongs to "our ancestors." That is, consequent upon the totality of custom is the identification of the way or custom of *one's own tribe*

with the good, and from this follows the identification of the ancestral with the good and of what is one's own with the good:

> "Our" way is the right way because it is both old and "our own," or because it is both "home-bred and prescriptive." Just as "old and one's own" was originally identical with right or good, so "new and strange" originally stood for bad. The notion connection "old" and "one's own" is "ancestral." *Prephilosophic life is characterized by the primeval identification of the good with the ancestral.*[19]

Furthermore, one must note that Strauss maintains that the ancestral is accepted as the source of the right, or is accepted as authoritative and superior to us, because it is identified with the gods: the ancestral customs are superior and authoritative because at some point in the most remote antiquity they were established by gods, the sons of gods, or pupils of gods.[20] One is reminded, casually, of Lycurgus the founder of the Spartan constitution, who was a pupil of Apollo, and of the Spartan kings who were said to be descended from Zeus, the sons of Heracles; of Cecrops, the legendary half-reptile founder of Athens, who chose its patron goddess and who instituted its most sacred rites regarding marriage and worship; of Numa Pompilius, who established Roman laws, including especially Roman marriage laws;[21] and so on.

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[19] NRH p. 88 ; note that Strauss tacitly agrees with Nietzsche that the "English" reduction of the origin of "the good" to calculation or benefit is wrong. This does not mean, however, that Strauss agrees with Nietzsche's own genealogy of "the good" in aristocratic morality; but he does not explicitly or even implicitly argue *against* this either. See also, "The emergence of philosophy radically affects man's attitude toward political things in general and toward laws in particular, because it radically affects his understanding of these things. Originally, the authority par excellence or the root of all authority was the ancestral. Through the discovery of nature the claim of the ancestral is uprooted; philosophy appeals from the ancestral to the good, to that which is good intrinsically, to that which is good by nature. Yet philosophy uproots the claim of the ancestral in such a manner as to preserve an essential element of it..." NRH 91

[20] "An illiterate society at its best is a society ruled by age-old ancestral custom which it traces to original founders, gods or sons of gods or pupils of gods..." Strauss "What is Liberal Education," An Address Delivered at the Tenth Annual Graduation Exercises of the Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults June 6, 1959

[21] See Plutarch *Numa Pompilius:* "and then Numa, leaving the conversation of the town, betook himself to a country life, and in a solitary manner frequented the groves and fields consecrated to the gods, passing his life in desert places. And this in particular gave occasion to the story about the

Strauss is single-minded in the pursuit of the means by which philosophy or the philosophers refine the understanding of the ancestral, on entirely logical grounds, in order to arrive at an understanding of nature. As this thesis attempts to present an alternative view of the origin of the idea of nature—out of the same elements, however, that Strauss himself considers as constitutive of the prephilosophical mind—we must now depart somewhat from Strauss as a source. For Strauss presents a plausible and entirely reasonable means by which philosophy or philosophers themselves refine prephilosophical ideas. But for Nietzsche the question, as we will see, is what allows for the emergence of philosophy itself or the idea of nature itself. And in this case the *motivation* for philosophizing is in large part inseparable from the substance or content of that very philosophizing—a concept that Strauss himself accepted at least for the case of the Epicurean philosophy.[22] For it is not at all clear, from what has just been said, how there can ever be an "out" from a situation in which ancestral *nomos* rules with such ubiquitous and undisputed power. There are therefore intermediary steps that are necessary for the very emergence of the idea of nature, let alone for the emergence of philosophers. This is all the more so since primitive societies that are ruled by *nomos* seem to have the character of a homogenous and fundamental "democracy,"

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goddess, namely, that Numa did not retire from human society out of any melancholy or disorder of mind, but because he had tasted the joys of more elevated intercourse, and, admitted to celestial wedlock in the love and converse of the goddess Egeria, had attained to blessedness, and to a divine wisdom." See also Emperor Julian *Against the Galileans* bk. I, who appears to quote Plutarch and also preserves the more ancient view, yet after the establishment of philosophy in the cities: "But when after her foundation many wars encompassed her, she won and prevailed in them all; and since she ever increased in size in proportion to her very dangers and needed greater security, then Zeus set over her the great philosopher Numa. This then was the excellent and upright Numa who dwelt in deserted groves and ever communed with the gods in the pure thoughts of his own heart.... It was he who established most of the laws concerning temple worship."

[22] See, again, SCR 38-42, especially p. 41 first paragraph where this is discussed explicitly.

perhaps totalitarian in character, that allows for no free thought. Let us then move to a consideration of this "totalitarian democracy," and then of the intermediary steps by which an idea different from and even antagonistic to *nomos* can emerge in the first place.

*c) early society as a "fundamental democracy"; the impotent character of early kingship, the reduction of all primitive regime forms to "totalitarian democracy"*

In the work of Rousseau we find a simple but excellent discussion of primitive religion, which somewhat parallels Strauss' own, though it makes certain important elaborations and additions that will be useful:

> At first men had no kings save the gods, and no government save theocracy. They reasoned like Caligula, and, at that period, reasoned aright. It takes a long time for feeling so to change that men can make up their minds to take their equals as masters, in the hope that they will profit by doing so.
>
> From the mere fact that God was set over every political society, it followed that there were as many gods as peoples. Two peoples that were strangers the one to the other, and almost always enemies, could not long recognise the same master: two armies giving battle could not obey the same leader. National divisions thus led to polytheism, and this in turn gave rise to theological and civil intolerance, which, as we shall see hereafter, are by nature the same... The fancy the Greeks had for rediscovering their gods among the barbarians arose from the way they had of regarding themselves as the natural Sovereigns of such peoples. But there is nothing so absurd as the erudition which in our days identifies and confuses gods of different nations. As if Moloch, Saturn, and Chronos could be the same god! As if the Phoenician Baal, the Greek Zeus, and the Latin Jupiter could be the same! As if there could still be anything common to imaginary beings with different names!
>
> If it is asked how in pagan times, where each State had its cult and its gods, there were no wars of religion, I answer that it was precisely because each State, having its own cult as well as its own government, made no distinction between its gods and its laws. Political war was also theological; the provinces of the gods were, so to speak, fixed by the boundaries of nations. The god of one people had no right over another... [This religion,] which is codified in a single country, gives it its gods, its own tutelary patrons; it has its dogmas, its rites, and its external cult prescribed by law; outside the single nation that follows it, all the world is in its sight infidel, foreign and barbarous; the duties and rights of man extend for it only as far as its own altars. Of this kind were all the religions of early peoples, which we may define as civil or positive divine right or law.[23]

[23] Rousseau *Social Contract* IV.8 "Civil Religion."

Rousseau makes roughly the same judgments that Strauss does, but he extends the discussion somewhat—not only with vivid examples, but by emphasizing the extreme *particularity* of the prephilosophic mind, which naturally created such a gulf between different peoples.[24] Rousseau says that in the beginning there was something akin to a perfect theocracy where man had no kings and where the gods—or what he calls "positive divine right or law"—held sway. This is similar to Strauss' claim that *nomos* or custom initially had absolute authority, and all authority derived from the ancestral, with no reference to kingship or rule by men. The difference between Strauss and Rousseau, however, comes from the fact that Rousseau *does* refer to "the doctrine that ancient kings had, that they were descended from gods," a doctrine that Rousseau obviously believes to have arrived *later* than the original and perfect theocracy (rule by divine law), but *before* world-changing innovations such as philosophy, or, later, Christianity.

In this connection, the work of James George Frazer[25] in *The Golden Bough* is most useful for understanding the transitional steps through which the early theocracy of laws turns into a kingship. Frazer's work agrees with the views

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[24] He also hints at one distinguishing characteristic of the Greeks, "the way they had of regarding themselves as the natural Sovereigns of such peoples," an attitude that affected also their theological notions.

[25] Frazer's work was temporarily ignored or dismissed by many academic anthropologists in the second half of the 20th century, but there has been much recent interest in his book, and a belated acknowledgment that much of his research is based on sound anthropological observations. See especially Luc de Heusch's "The Symbolic Mechanisms of Sacred Kingship: Rediscovering Frazer," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* vol 3. no. 2 1997: *"Though it appears in diverse historical forms, sacred kingship always has a common theme: the body-fetish of the chief or king articulates the natural or social orders. It is a body condemned to be sacrificed before its natural end, and which, in the event of calamity, will be society's scapegoat. It is just as Frazer envisaged it.";* see Joan Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship* Stanford 1997; see the recent "Bodies of Lenin: The Hidden Science of Communist Sovereignty" Alexei Yurchak *Representations* Vol. 129, No. 1 (Winter 2015) (pp. 116-157) p. 131 and note 73 where Frazer's enduring legacy and the legitimacy of his observations are briefly mentioned.

presented so far from Strauss, Rousseau, Hume, and Burckhardt in several key ways. For example, Frazer understands early religion to be based on two forms of magic, which on closer inspection are but logical misunderstandings regarding the workings of nature. Yet these misunderstandings are in a sense very "reasonable," and contain the seeds for later refinement into science and logic; this view posits that philosophy (or science) evolves from and preserves certain elements of the prephilosophic mind—itself in a sense a "resonable" if misguided attempt to understand man and nature. Frazer's account, however, is much more thorough than what we have considered so far, and he pays very close attention to the transition only hinted at by Rousseau—the transition between a "total" regime of laws, and one where there is at least a form of "sacral" or ceremonial kingship. The key insight to establish here is that according to Frazer this early regime of laws is in fact a kind of "totalitarian *democracy.*"

> No human being is so hide-bound by custom and tradition as your democratic savage; in no state of society consequently is progress so slow and difficult. The old notion that the savage is the freest of mankind is the reverse of the truth. He is a slave, not indeed to a visible master, but to the past, to the spirits of his dead forefathers, who haunt his steps from birth to death, and rule him with a rod of iron. What they did is the pattern of right, the unwritten law to which he yields a blind unquestioning obedience. The least possible scope is thus afforded to superior talent to change old customs for the better. The ablest man is dragged down by the weakest and dullest, who necessarily sets the standard, since he cannot rise, while the other can fall. **The surface of such a society presents a uniform dead level, so far as it is humanly possible to reduce the natural inequalities, the immeasurable real differences of inborn capacity and temper, to a false superficial appearance of equality.** From this low and stagnant condition of affairs, which demagogues and dreamers in later times have lauded as the ideal state, the Golden Age, of humanity, everything that helps to raise society by opening a career to talent and proportioning the degrees of authority to men's natural abilities, deserves to be welcomed by all who have the real good of their fellows at heart.[26]

The *fundamental democracy* of the primitive system to which both Strauss and Rousseau refer in rather abstract terms, or rather the democracy they imply,

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[26] GB p. 47

becomes very clear in this passage. Frazer is not alone in having made such observations. One is reminded of course of Nietzsche's rather contemptuous remark that the earliest form of social organization, the most primitive form, is the democratic and socialist commune.[27] Frazer adds that the character of this original democracy is a despotism more absolute than what we can imagine under any modern state: "For after all there is more liberty in the best sense—liberty to think our own thoughts and to fashion our own destinies—under the most absolute despotism, the most grinding tyranny, than under the apparent freedom of savage life, where the individual's lot is cast from the cradle to the grave in the iron mould of hereditary custom."[28]

Over and against this fundamental and original democracy of sorts, Frazer attempts to explain how it was that rule and kingship first developed. It was the tribal sorcerer or magician who was able to use deceit to enhance his own position that represents the earliest form of the king, or indeed, which here seems to be the same, of the man who could in some way escape *nomos* by manipulating it:

> But in savage society there is commonly to be found in addition what we may call public magic, that is, sorcery practised for the benefit of the whole community. Wherever ceremonies of this sort are observed for the common good, it is obvious that the magician ceases to be merely a private practitioner and becomes to some extent a public functionary. The development of such a class of functionaries is of great importance for the political as well as the religious evolution of society. For when the welfare of the tribe is supposed to depend on the performance of these magical rites, the magician rises into a position of much influence and repute, and may readily acquire the rank and authority of a chief or king. The profession accordingly draws into its ranks some of the ablest and most ambitious men of the tribe, because it holds out to them a prospect of honour, wealth, and power such as hardly any other career could offer. The acuter minds perceive how easy it is to dupe their weaker brother and to play on his superstition for their own advantage. Not that the sorcerer is always a knave and impostor; he is often sincerely convinced that he really possesses those wonderful powers which the credulity of his fellows ascribes to him. But the more sagacious he is, the more likely he is to see through the fallacies which impose on duller wits. Thus the ablest members of the profession must tend to be more or less conscious deceivers; and it is just these men

[27] Nietzsche GM I.5
[28] Frazer GB 3.4 p. 48

who in virtue of their superior ability will generally come to the top and win for themselves positions of the highest dignity and the most commanding authority.[29]

Frazer adds that it is precisely these "counter-virtues" so to speak, of deceitfulness, knavery, wiliness that are most needful in a condition where tradition and custom weigh down heavily on the human mind; indeed, the mind itself is only liberated through such "immorality":

The pitfalls which beset the path of the professional sorcerer are many, and as a rule only the man of coolest head and sharpest wit will be able to steer his way through them safely. For it must always be remembered that every single profession and claim put forward by the magician as such is false; not one of them can be maintained without deception, conscious or unconscious. Accordingly the sorcerer who sincerely believes in his own extravagant pretensions is in far greater peril and is much more likely to be cut short in his career than the deliberate impostor. The honest wizard always expects that his charms and incantations will produce their supposed effect; and when they fail, not only really, as they always do, but conspicuously and disastrously, as they often do, he is taken aback: he is not, like his knavish colleague, ready with a plausible excuse to account for the failure, and before he can find one he may be knocked on the head by his disappointed and angry employers.[30]

The issue at hand is the manipulation of custom and tradition by one man for the purposes of energetic and intelligent rule. This brings us to the main point of Frazer's chapter, the necessity of the development of kingship (as opposed to rule by divine law) for the emergence of "liberty in the best sense," that is, liberty to think one's own thoughts, and the liberty to pursue disinterested knowledge. These are but end-products of a process through which the tyranny of ancestral *nomos* is overturned by an energetic, deceitful man. The necessity of deceit, usurpation of convention, and finally of the conquest of neighbors—these are all preconditions for the development of what Frazer calls civilization and for the development of science.

The general result is that at this stage of social evolution the supreme power tends to fall into the hands of men of the keenest intelligence and the most unscrupulous character.... Once these elevating

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[29] Frazer GB 3.4 "The Magician's Progress"

[30] ibid; The last part of this paragraph in particular should be compared with Strauss' interpretation of Xenophon's *Anabasis,* in particular on Xenophon's deceptive use of oracles; See Strauss SPPP 105-37 esp. p. 129, where Xenophon (in the *Anabasis*) is shown to conceal unfavorable oracle.

influences [of the magician/man of intelligence] have begun to operate—and they cannot be for ever suppressed—the progress of civilisation becomes comparatively rapid. The rise of one man to supreme power enables him to carry through changes in a single lifetime which previously many generations might not have sufficed to effect...**Even the whims and caprices of a tyrant may be of service in breaking the chain of custom which lies so heavy on the savage.** And as soon as the tribe ceases to be swayed by the timid and divided counsels of the elders, and yields to the direction of a single strong and resolute mind, it becomes formidable to its neighbours and enters on a career of aggrandisement, which at an early stage of history is often highly favourable to social, industrial, and intellectual progress. For extending its sway, partly by force of arms, partly by the voluntary submission of weaker tribes, the community soon acquires wealth and slaves, both of which, by relieving some classes from the perpetual struggle for a bare subsistence, afford them an opportunity of devoting themselves to that disinterested pursuit of knowledge which is the noblest and most powerful instrument to ameliorate the lot of man.[31]

If we look past the rhetorical element of this presentation, with which one may or may not agree, and perhaps if we manage for a moment to restrain a desire to dismiss this passage as an example of *fin-de-siecle* optimism regarding the progress of civilization, we then consider Frazer's main point here, which is that the early despot, inseparable from the figure of the early magician, is perhaps one of the *only* means of breaking with the absolute totality of *nomos* and tradition over every aspect of life and thought: and that the rival to the rule of Custom is the sorcerer's or the king's intelligence, which first may be expressed only through its manipulations of popular belief in magic, magic meaning manipulation of "natural" forces for profit. How precisely does this early kingship emerge and what is its opponent?

The opponent of intelligence is the rule of the elders, the institution through which the rule of custom, the rule of the *ancestral,* is made concrete. For Frazer at least, it is clear that one of the ways kingship develops is through an intelligent individual's manipulation of the "public profession of magic": but how exactly does this happen? The magician's opponent in general is Custom and tradition. But this opponent is made concrete and in-the-flesh through the elders who actually rule

[31] Frazer GB 3.4 "The Magician's Progress"

primitive societies. The council of elders, or what Frazer calls the oligarchy of elders, is the typical institution of rule in many tribal societies and exemplifies concretely what Strauss calls the supreme authority that derives from the ancestral. Elsewhere Frazer adds that,

> These savages [in Central Australia] are ruled neither by chiefs nor kings. So far as their tribes can be said to have a political constitution, it is a democracy or rather an oligarchy of old and influential men, who meet in council and decide on all measures of importance to the practical exclusion of the younger men. Their deliberative assembly answers to the senate of later times: if we had to coin a word for such a government of elders we might call it a *gerontocracy*...[32]

By contrast, in other parts of the world magicians and medicine men manage to make a relatively complete break with the rule of elders and the totality of custom; it is worth considering the wealth of colorful examples that Frazer brings to support his claim of how precisely *nomos* is overcome by the wily manipulator of magic and superstition:

> In point of fact magicians appear to have often developed into chiefs and kings... According to a native account, the origin of the power of Melanesian chiefs lies entirely in the belief that they have communication with mighty ghosts, and wield that supernatural power whereby they can bring the influence of the ghosts to bear... Still rising in the scale of culture we come to Africa, where both the chieftainship and the kingship are fully developed; and here the evidence for the evolution of the chief out of the magician, and especially out of the rain-maker, is comparatively plentiful. Thus among the Wambugwe, a Bantu people of East Africa, the original form of government was a family republic, but the enormous power of the sorcerers, transmitted by inheritance, soon raised them to the rank of petty lords or chiefs. Of the three chiefs living in the country in 1894 two were much dreaded as magicians... Again, among the tribes of the Upper Nile the medicine-men are generally the chiefs. Their authority rests above all upon their supposed power of making rain... In Western as well as in Eastern and Central Africa we meet with the same union of chiefly with magical functions. Thus in the Fan tribe the strict distinction between chief and medicine-man does not exist. The chief is also a medicine-man and a smith to boot; for the Fans esteem the smith's craft sacred, and none but chiefs may meddle with it... Throughout the Malay region the rajah or king is commonly regarded with superstitious veneration as the possessor of supernatural powers, and there are grounds for thinking that he too, like apparently so many African chiefs, has been developed out of a simple magician... The Dyaks of Sarawak believed that their famous English ruler, Rajah Brooke, was endowed with a certain magical virtue which, if properly applied, could render the rice-crops abundant. Hence when he visited a tribe, they used to bring him the seed which they intended to sow next year, and he fertilised it by shaking over it the women's necklaces...[33]

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[32] Frazer GB VI "Magicians as Kings"

[33] ibid; For a remarkable parallel note that the very first Japanese emperors, understood to be "children of the sun," held as one of their principal offices the distribution of sacred rice during planting time, see Manabu Waida, "Sacred Kingship in Early Japan: a Historical Introduction" in

In all these cases the manipulation of natural powers, in particular the belief that the chief may control the vital powers of regeneration and rebirth, having of course to do with crops and the condition of livestock, begins slowly to trump the absolute rule of Custom or *nomos.* In a humorous analogy or prefiguration of the power of the philosopher—a humorous analogy that we should certainly not take too far—the sorcerer gains power over the tribe and manages to escape the shackles of convention by convincing his fellow men that he understands and can control "the things in heaven and under the earth."

Slowly, however, the magician-chief or -king begins to assume an office that is more secure and that we can recognize historically in the great Oriental despotisms: slowly, that is, the concept of divine kingship begins to form, or the idea that the king is an incarnate god—of which Rousseau earlier made mention. Frazer explains it in the following way:

> But the great social revolution which thus begins with democracy and ends in despotism is attended by an intellectual revolution which affects both the conception and the functions of royalty...the magician gives way to the priest...it is often imagined that men may themselves attain to godhead, not merely after their death, but in their lifetime, through the temporary or permanent possession of their whole nature by a great and powerful spirit. No class of the community has benefited so much as kings by this belief in the possible incarnation of a god in human form.[34]

We can see from this last passage that the religious function of the king, or the unity of priestly and kingly offices, which one would maybe otherwise casually assume to come from the very earliest stages of superstition, are in fact relatively "late" developments of relatively civilized and complex societies. Several stages of development are necessary between the primitive "rule by divine law" or "absolute

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*History of Religions,* May 1975, 15.4 ; the actual power of these emperors was severely curtailed by entrenched custom, however.

[34] ibid

authority of the ancestral" to put it in Rousseau's and Strauss' words respectively, and the later institution of dual priestly-kingly rule.

On the other hand early kingship, though it can often be characterized as a despotism, is itself "bound" to custom in often severe ways. The power of the early king is not so great, and often devolves into a merely ceremonial, indeed, a sacrificial function. In this case *nomos* remains all-powerful and the council of elders, the keepers of ancestral right, maintain or reassert absolute control over the community: the king diminshes into a sacrificial figure, sacrificed for the preservation of the tribe. Indeed, the entire purpose of Frazer's book is to explain a primitive Roman ritual where a cultic "king of the wood," lacking in all civil power, is "sacrificed." While this may indeed be an extreme example, it must be emphasized that traditional kingship, whether of the divine form (where the king is a living god) or of the sacral form (where the king rules by the grace and sanction of a god) is by no means *absolute rule,* and that indeed the king may be heavily burdened with extreme duties deriving from inherited custom—Frazer's sacrificial "king of the wood," or the much-discussed West African "scapegoat" sacrificial kings[35] being especially telling cases. Here are some especially vivid examples of what primitive "kingship" actually consists of:

> The king of Calicut, on the Malabar coast, bears the title of Samorin or Samory. He "pretends to be of a higher rank than the Brahmans, and to be inferior only to the invisible gods; a pretention that was acknowledged by his subjects, but which is held as absurd and abominable by the Brahmans, by whom he is only treated as a Sudra." Formerly the Samorin had to cut his throat in public at the end of a twelve years' reign... There are some grounds for believing that the reign of many ancient Greek

[35] See especially the discussion in the aforementioned Luc de Heusch's "The Symbolic Mechanisms of Sacred Kingship: Rediscovering Frazer," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* vol 3. no. 2 1997; see also Robert Carlson "Hierarchy and the Haya Divine Kingship: A Structural and Symbolic Reformulation of Frazer's Thesis," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 20, No. 2 (May, 1993), pp. 312-335; but the best source for such varied information from across world cultures is in Frazer himself.

kings was limited to eight years, or at least that at the end of every period of eight years a new consecration, a fresh outpouring of the divine grace, was regarded as necessary in order to enable them to discharge their civil and religious duties. Thus it was a rule of the Spartan constitution that every eighth year the ephors should choose a clear and moonless night and sitting down observe the sky in silence. If during their vigil they saw a meteor or shooting star, they inferred that the king had sinned against the deity, and they suspended him from his functions until the Delphic or Olympic oracle should reinstate him in them. This custom, which has all the air of great antiquity, was not suffered to remain a dead letter even in the last period of the Spartan monarchy; for in the third century before our era a king, who had rendered himself obnoxious to the reforming party, was actually deposed on various trumped-up charges, among which the allegation that the ominous sign had been seen in the sky took a prominent place... That a king should regularly have been put to death at the close of a year's reign will hardly appear improbable when we learn that to this day there is still a kingdom in which the reign and the life of the sovereign are limited to a single day. In Ngoio, a province of the ancient kingdom of Congo, the rule obtains that the chief who assumes the cap of sovereignty is always killed on the night after his coronation. The right of succession lies with the chief of the Musurongo; but we need not wonder that he does not exercise it, and that the throne stands vacant. "No one likes to lose his life for a few hours' glory on the Ngoio throne."[36]

In the passage above the role of the Brahmans as hereditary priests could be seen as roughly analogous to the that of the primitive "council of elders" in prephilosophic societies; similarly so for the ruling body that could depose a Spartan king after eight years. It must be concluded then that primitive society is a kind of totalitarian democracy, the rule of custom is absolute and levels all, and "kingship" is originally in fact more of a ceremonial or sacrificial function. One could almost observe a general rule where *the further* the kingly office moves away from cultic and religious trappings, the more actual power he has and vice versa. To consider yet another example, although chieftainship and kingship are "well developed" in Western Africa, and the chief certainly does wield power through the channels Frazer indicates, he is in practice not only hamstrung by infinite duties and

[36] Frazer GB XXIV. "The Killing of the Divine King" section 3. "Kings Killed at the End of a Fixed Term"; see also Vladimir Petrukhin, "Sacral Kingship and the Judaism of the Khazars," Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia, Vienna, 2013. P. 291-301; where the accounts of Ibn Fadlan and al-Masudi regarding the entirely similar sacral and sacrificial kingship of the Khazar khagan are discussed. The power in the Khazar Empire lay with the *bek*, a military ruler similar to the Japanese *shogun*, while the khagan, the older function, had an entirely ceremonial position. It should be noted however that originally the position of khagan probably did have the energetic kingly and military power that Frazer praises, but later regressed to what appears in fact to be the "default" position of kingship as such, which is merely sacral or ceremonial, and devoid of actual power.

inherited customs, but it could be argued that all effective power is in fact in the hands of communal secret societies, often with cultic foundations.[37] Thus although Frazer's account is very useful in explaining how in many cases the notion of rule begins to distinguish itself out of the fundamental or primitive "democracy," one should not imagine that in every case there is a linear development to Egyptian-style divine kingship or Babylonian-style sacral kingship. In all cases, even including these latter ones that form our archetypes of absolutist Oriental despotism, traditional kingship is still heavily bound to custom; so much so that in some places the kingship degenerates back into a cultic office, or even a ritually sacrificial one.[38]

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[37] See e.g. *West African Secret Societies* by Capt. F.W. Butt-Thompson 1929 London, a book intended as a practical manual for colonial management and therefore much concerned with the form and exercise of actual power and influence on the ground in West Africa—power that lay in large part with the secret societies; also *West African Religion*, Geoffrey Parrinder, New York 1970 and also Parrinder "African Ideas of Witchcraft" *Folklore* Vol. 67, No. 3 (Sep., 1956), pp. 142-150 where witchcraft is discussed in relationship to cultic secret societies. Most interesting in the context of Frazer's discussion of the rule of elders would be "Secret Knowledge as Property and Power in Kpelle Society: Elders versus Youth" William P. Murphy *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 50, No. 2 (1980), pp. 193-207 where the focus is explicitly on the use of the secret societies for the benefit of the social, political, and economic control by the primitive *gerontocracy* at the expense of the youth.

[38] Such considerations apply also to the much more recent distinction between medieval kingship and modern bureaucratic states, whether democratic or not. Medieval kings were indeed bound by infinite constraints—the heavy weight of custom, the power of competing nobles, of relatives, of the Church, not to speak of the limitations of technology—that are not shared by modern regimes of whatever form; indeed it has been argued that the modern democracy is able to exert a far greater control over life and liberty than any medieval king could have dreamt of. Consider only the simple example of military mobilization: a medieval king could never hope to mobilize a national army through a draft. The modern centralized state, whether it is democratic or dictatorial in form is able to exert a far greater power than any medieval king. As Tocqueville pointed out,

> The old localized authorities disappear without either revival or replacement, and everywhere the central government succeeds them in the direction of affairs. The whole of Germany, even the whole of Europe, presents in this respect the same picture. Everywhere men are leaving behind the liberty of the Middle Ages, not to enter in a modern brand of liberty but to return to the ancient despotism; for centralization is nothing else than an up-to-date version of the administration seen in the Roman Empire. [From Tocqueville's letters, as quoted in Bertrand de Jouvenel's *On Power* 1976, pg. 285]

To this remark, Jouvenel adds in his own words that,

> The history of the West, from the time of Europe's fragmentation into sovereign states, shows us an almost uninterrupted advance in the growth of governmental Power. The only way of failing to see it is to fix exclusive attention on the forms which Power takes: a picture of pure fantasy is then formed, in which monarchs appear

Philosophy, as Strauss notes, can only be born once the concept of nature appears. But it appears that the concept of nature itself can only appear *after* the rather late institutions of sacral and divine kingship exist, indeed after several other conditions are satisfied; and that, indeed, nature—the "source" simultaneously of both philosophy and tyranny, as argued in this thesis—really appears not as a rational concept, or by rational analogy to abstractions, but rather as a *manifestation* or, one could go so far as to say, a *revelation.* Its appearance, it must be emphasized, is *late,* it is *rare,* and only follows the emergence of a certain kind of early kingship and indeed the emergence of a certain kind of aristocracy that, unlike the early sacral king, manages to free itself entirely from the absolute "rule of the ancestral." In the next section, we consider this matter in the context of the development of Greek aristocracy.

## *II. Emergence of the Idea of Nature out of Greek Aristocratic Morality*

### *a) The Aristocratic Principle as Distinct from the Primitive "Fundamental Democracy"; Historical Origins of the Aristocratic Principle in the Greek World and Elsewhere*

In this section I show, first of all, that a principle of rule, or way of life, different from that of primitive *nomos,* or the "fundamental democracy" briefly described in the previous chapter, can likely only develop when a native population

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as masters to whose exactions there are no bounds, to be succeeded by representative governments whose resources are proportionate to their authority, until in the end democracy succeeds and receives from a consenting people only what it choose to give to a Power which is its servant. [Jouvenel, *On Power* 1976 pg. 140]

is conquered and subdued by a foreign elite. That this foreign, top-down imposition, *most often by a pastoral population on top of a farming population,* is the origin of all genuine aristocratic morality, which can for now be provisionally reduced to the dual ideas of *liberty* and of *breeding*—the latter to be taken very literally. And that the elements inherent in this early conquest are preserved within and fundamentally constitute the aristocratic principle even after the two original populations have fused ethnically or racially and the fact of conquest is forgotten. I furthermore show that this model describes the Greek case, the origin and character of Greek aristocratic morality.

Now, it should not be clear, from the account given above, how a principle could have at all developed that was different from the "absolute authority of the ancestral," the primitive "perfect theocracy," the early "fundamental democracy" and domination by elders—whichever formulation we should choose for the early "totalitarianism" of *nomos.* From Strauss' and Rousseau's accounts at least it is not to be seen how, given the situation they describe, a principle different from this could have developed on its own. The primitive *nomos* is all-encompassing. The individual in the tribe has no concept outside of the traditional tales and customs handed down by which to understand the world, one's entire perception is dominated by magic rites under the control of the community; life is a struggle for survival and the mind is dominated by frightening natural forces that have to be propitiated communally, for example, to guarantee the crops. To question tradition, or to show interest in the gods of neighboring tribes, is, as Rousseau states, criminal and it is treason to begin with. There are arguably tribes in our time, not to speak of historical times, that

never abandoned this condition. It is not clear how a tribe, considered by itself, would be able to leave this condition.

It is true that Strauss goes into some detail to show how philosophy preserved certain elements of the primitive worldview and how in some way it can be seen as a logical refinement and "thinking through" of these early perceptions and assumptions; but he by no means shows *why* and *how* such an alienation from the primitive and all-encompassing collective mind could have occurred in the first place. After all, many tribes have a simple remedy for such signs of alienation and questioning: death. Strauss claims that the idea of nature is partly conceived of as the result of the fundamental distinction that could be drawn between "the things made by man, and the things not made by man."[39] But this is obviously a strange remark: for it is clear that one must be able, and allowed, to see this distinction as fundamental in the first place. But under "the absolute rule of the ancestral" such considerations are blasphemous and treasonous. *Nomos* prevents such questioning to begin with, even within one's mind. Indeed, one can go further here and say that for philosophy to be practiced and for the idea of nature to appear, one must be able to see "the things not made by man" as superior and worthy of investigation in the first place. But for the primitive mind what lies outside the village boundaries and its tales is worthless or frightening.

The historical rarity of philosophy and of the idea of nature alone[40] is cause enough to consider the possibility that the precondition of philosophy is something

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[39] Strauss NRH p. 88

[40] Recall that Strauss himself begins "The Origin of the Idea of Natural Right" by pointing out that Hebrew has no word for nature (NRH p. 81); indeed the word exists only in Greek and in languages—

rare and special, and not a merely abstract thinking through of features common to all conventions or all tribes as such. Obviously the alienation, but also the confidence and the intellectual sophistication to question tradition in the first place, plus a certain amount of freedom, must precede the precise form of questioning; Strauss, perhaps for good reason, only deals with the form the questioning takes. But it is not conceivable that Thales could have come upon the concept of nature, let alone publicly expounded it, in a society that was under the total and absolute rule of one ancestral custom and that lived in permanent terror of magic.

The only way a principle different from this form of early democracy (or communitarianism or collectivism if one wishes) can be introduced is through conquest by a foreign tribe or elite. This is not to say that all conquest results in the development of an aristocratic ethos. But where this latter exists—where, that is, there exists not merely a ruling class, but a principle of rule and "ideal" or, more precisely, a way of life different from and not responsible to the "fundamental democracy"—it is most probably the result of a foreign imposition by conquest, in particular conquest by tribes whose social, military, and economic organization is very different from that of the conquered to begin with. It is very difficult to imagine that a true aristocracy can rise on its own out of the primitive "rule of the ancestral."

Frazer's account would seem to contradict this claim, but in fact it does not. It is true that Frazer's book gives a relatively satisfying story about how a culture begins in the early collectivist-democratic condition, then possibly progresses to one

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Latin—that have been exposed to Greek philosophy. While Strauss may have good reason to ignore or pass over the special preconditions that allowed the concept of nature to emerge apparently *only* among the Greeks in all of human history, it is the purpose of this thesis to investigate precisely these special preconditions.

where superstition and magic-men rule,[41] then evolves to one where divine and sacral kings rule; that this is followed by the development of religion, later of science, and so on. But, even if one should believe that knowledge progresses chronologically according to this pattern in the case of every culture, a closer look at Frazer's own words will show that his book supports, indirectly at least, the claim regarding the origins of an aristocratic way of life or ethos. A local king or magician may rise to prominence and rule; but he will be at most able to pass on his power to his heirs. He will not be able to create a ruling class with a way of life fundamentally different from that of the ruled. There are historically many cases where a king, or even a bureaucratic mandarin class, exists, that nevertheless has an entirely managerial function and does not represent a morality or virtue different from that of the ruled population—it is only a managerial extension of this same population.[42]

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[41] It is interesting that Nietzsche himself considers superstition to be an individualistic development in a culture, a sign of relative advancement; the following section much agrees with Frazer's own thoughts on "magic" and superstition:

The superstitious man is always much more of a "person," in comparison with the religious man, and a superstitious society will be one in which there are many individuals and a delight in individuality. Seen from this standpoint superstition always appears as a progress in comparison with belief, and as a sign that the intellect becomes more independent and claims to have its rights. Those who reverence the old religion and the religious disposition then complain of corruption... [GS 23]

[42] Tocqueville, that great thinker on the problem of democratic despotism noticed that in his own time the philosophes' hankering and admiration after the Chinese model was no accident, and hints at the purposes of the "meritocratic" model of assigning offices; and in this interesting passage explains also the great difference between a hereditary aristocracy, such as Europe had, and a bureaucratic mandarin meritocracy, such as existed in China, and which is in fact a tool of despotism:

They were quite familiar with the form of tyranny which we call democratic despotism, and which had not been conceived in the Middle Ages. No more social hierarchies, no distinctions of class or rank; a people consisting of individuals entirely equal, and as nearly alike as possible; this body acknowledged as the only legitimate sovereign, but carefully deprived of the means of directing or even superintending the government; over it a single agent, commissioned to perform all acts without consulting his principals: to control him, a public sense of right and wrong, destitute of organs for its expression; to check him, revolutions, not laws; the agent being de jure a subordinate agent, in fact a master: such was the plan. Finding nothing in their neighborhood conformable to this ideal of theirs, they went to the heart of Asia in search of a model. I do not exaggerate when I affirm that every one of them wrote in some place or other an emphatic eulogium on China. One is sure to find at least that in their books; and as China is very imperfectly known even in our day, their statements on its subject are

The sacral or sacrificial kings discussed above are an excellent example, but similar cases exist even in technologically advanced societies. Even Frazer seems to realize this, because in his account he adds, at one crucial point, that

> as soon as the tribe ceases to be swayed by the timid and divided counsels of the elders, and yields to the direction of a single strong and resolute mind, *it becomes formidable to its neighbours and enters on a career of aggrandisement,* which at an early stage of history is often highly favourable to social, industrial, and intellectual progress. For extending its sway, partly by force of arms, partly by the voluntary submission of weaker tribes, *the community soon acquires wealth and slaves, both of which, by relieving some classes from the perpetual struggle for a bare subsistence, afford them an opportunity of devoting themselves to that disinterested pursuit of knowledge* which is the noblest and most powerful instrument to ameliorate the lot of man.[43]

The crucial step then in the progress from the early society to one in which *some classes* are relieved "from the perpetual struggle for bare substistence" is the conquest of one's neighbors, the imposition of one's own society on top of another, following which both still continue to exist somehow separately. One need not take the extra step with Frazer and claim that this event alone is sufficient for a devotion to the "disinterested pursuit of knowledge," or that the purpose of knowledge is betterment of man's estate; one need only concede that philosophy is not possible in the Rousseauean "city of pigs," and that Glaucon is a prerequisite for the later development of philosophy—a claim for now to be left as a suggestion, but which is to be elaborated in later chapters. Regardless it is clear that even in Frazer's own evolutionary model, the imposition of an aristocratic caste on top of a sedentary

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generally pure nonsense. They wanted all the nations of the world to set up exact copies of that barbarous and imbecile government, which a handful of Europeans master whenever they please. China was for them what England, and afterward America, became for all Frenchmen. They were filled with emotion and delight at the contemplation of a government wielded by an absolute but unprejudiced sovereign, who honored the useful arts by plowing once a year with his own hands; of a nation whose only religion was philosophy, whose only aristocracy were men of letters, whose public offices were awarded to the victors at literary tournaments. It is generally believed that the destructive theories known by the name of socialism are of modern origin. This is an error. These theories are coeval with the earliest economists. While some of them wanted to use the absolute power they desired to establish to change the forms of society, others proposed to employ it in ruining its fundamental basis. [Tocqueville *On the Old Regime* 1856 p. 198]

[43] Frazer GB 3.4

population is a crucial prerequisite for the development of the intellect or of science, even if he should not elaborate or dwell on this particular event.

Wherever we find in the real world a truly "aristocratic attitude" or morality, it seems to have been imposed from outside by a conquering tribe or elite. A very vivid image, that is especially useful for the argument developed here, appears in the Congo-born Pierre L. van den Berghe's recent study of the history of Tutsi-Hutu relations in Rwanda,

> One thing, however, that Rwanda clearly lacks is nationhood. Rwanda is a sharply hierarchized society divided into three quasi-caste groups: the dominant Tuzi who, until the revolution of the early 1960's made up some 17% of the population, the Hutu peasantry with some 82%, and a small pygmoid group, the Twa, making up 1% of the total. The monarchy, established by the pastoralist Tuzi conquerors who came down from Ethiopia in the 16th century, was entirely the political instrument of the Tuzi as an ethnic ruling elite...The Tuzi, who are Nilotic pastoralists similar in physical features to the Galla and other peoples of Ethiopia, are a racially and socially self-conscious ruling group, deliberately use the state machinery they monopolize (except at the lowest village level), to dominate and exploit the Hutu peasantry. They developed a genuine racist ideology, taking pride in their slender, tall stature (some 15 cm taller than the Hutu, and 30 cm taller than the Twa on average) and their distinctive facial features (such as their aquiline nose) and looking down on both the Hutu and the Twa as coarse, ugly, and inferior...The Tuzi regard themselves and are regarded by others as intelligent, astute in political intrigue, born to command, refined, courageous, and cruel. The Hutu are viewed by their Tuzi masters much as peasants are all over the world. They are seen as hardworking, not very clever, extrovert, irascible, unmannerly, obedient and physically strong...These attributes are regarded as inherent in the nature of each group, though somewhat modified by learning; i.e., Rwanda developed a genuine brand of indigenous racism. Each group has its fixed, defined place in the social order. The Twa are a small pariah caste of hunters, potters, iron-workers, and archers in the Tuzi army. They are strictly endogamous and looked down upon by both Tuzi and Hutu. The Hutu till the land, tend the cattle owned by the Tuzi and are the source of the surplus production on which the Tuzi live parasitically. The Tuzi, headed by the *Mwami* (king) are the ruling aristocracy. They specialize in warfare and administration, despise manual labor and endeavor to spend as much of their lives in conspicuous leisure as possible. Tuzi women spend their time playing music, weaving fine artistic baskets, and supervising domestic servants. Both Tuzi men and women avoid even walking long distances; instead they are carried in basketry litters by their Hutu or Twa servants....The basic relationship between the Tuzi lord and the Hutu peasant is a feudal, paternalistic one. Underlying the political structure, there is, much as in medieval Europe or Japan, a vast network of patron-client ties that link individuals in private contracts where protection is exchanged for loyalty...[44]

This passage is quoted at length because it is a typical, indeed archetypal, case of how an aristocratic class develops through conquest of an indigenous

[44] Van den Berghe 1987 pg. 72-5

population: the parallels in attitude and behavior to what one could call "true aristocracies" across the world, and indeed to the ancient Greek case in particular, are very striking. Indeed these parallels extend to matters that may not at first sight be obvious or important. To begin with, the way the Tutsi are said to be seen by themselves and by others—"intelligent, astute in political intrigue, born to command, refined, courageous, and cruel"—could be said of aristocracy (as distinct from a mere elite, or even a mandarin elite) generally. In particular the two essential qualities mentioned—political ability or intelligence, and military courage—could be directly translated as *phronesis* and *andreia,* the two primal qualities of the Greek aristocrat in Homer or Pindar: the ability to give good counsel in assembly, and manliness or prowess in battle.[45] The parallel even extends to the past-times of aristocratic women—the persistence of political character, even in details, across time and cultures is truly remarkable—as the Homeric ideal seems to be a woman who weaves (fine cloths, not baskets, in the Greek case) and sings beautifully; the literary image that includes both elements and therefore must have appealed most to Homer's audience was that of Penelope.[46] The disdain for manual labor, and in particular for farmwork, is also universal, as we are about to see.

The matter of contempt for farming and manual labor is crucial. In the Greek world one of the most emphatic statements containing an attitude similar, maybe

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[45] See the following chapter on Pindar for a detailed discussion of the two heroic-aristocratic virtues.
[46] See especially Steven Lowenstam "The Shroud of Laertes and Penelope's Guile" *The Classical Journal* Vol. 95, No. 4 (Apr. - May, 2000), pp. 333-348, "The story of Laertes' shroud, which Penelope weaves during the day and unravels at night, is the only narrative that is told almost verbatim three times in Homer (Od. 2.93-110, 19.137-56, 24.129-48) and Maria C. Pantelia "Spinning and Weaving: Ideas of Domestic Order in Homer," *The American Journal of Philology* Vol. 114, No. 4 (Winter, 1993), pp. 493-501

identical, to that in the passage above exists in the archaic drinking song occasionally called "The Song of Hybrias,"

My wealth is my great spear and sword

And the good rawhide shield, bulwark of hide.

With this I plough, with this I reap,

With this I drink sweet wine from the vine,

With this I have gotten the name "Lord of the serfs".

Those who have not the courage to wield a spear and sword

And the good rawhide shield, bulwark of hide,

All of them fall and kiss my knee,

Calling me "Lord" and "Great King."[47]

This emphasis on martial virtue as a replacement for the drudgery of farmwork and as proof of the holder's vitality, freedom from the responsibility for the cares of life, and of his superiority to lesser men who must eke out a paltry living from the earth is, again, fundamental and universal to the development of aristocratic morality. The mentality here consists in a *lack of equality* to a lower class of people, who are felt to be not merely alien ethnically, but who are seen as radically different in way of life, in particular as tied to the earth and to the *preservation of mere life,* to servile domesticity, in a way that the aristocrat is not. This characteristic contempt of farmwork and of mere life understood as drudgery

[47] H.W. Smyth *Greek Melic Poets* London 1900 p. 53 as quoted in "The First Tyrants in Greece" by Robert Drews *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Bd. 21, H. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1972), p 142

and preservation appears also in Tacitus' description of the early Germanic tribes; these still lived a non-agricultural, semi-nomadic life, when he says of them that,

> Nor are they as easily persuaded to plough the earth and to wait for the year's produce as to challenge an enemy and earn the honour of wounds. Nay, they actually think it tame and stupid to acquire by the sweat of toil what they might win by their blood...Whenever they are not fighting, they pass much of their time in the chase, and still more in idleness, giving themselves up to sleep and to feasting, the bravest and the most warlike doing nothing, and surrendering the management of the household, of the home, and of the land, to the women, the old men, and all the weakest members of the family.... The master requires from the slave a certain quantity of grain, of cattle, and of clothing, as he would from a tenant, and this is the limit of subjection. All other household functions are discharged by the wife and children.[48]

Like the Tutsis described above, the Germanic tribes were still pastoralist at this stage, and not primarily grain eaters: "Their food is of a simple kind, consisting of wild fruit, fresh game, and curdled milk."[49] This attitude is instantly recognizable to any reader of Homer or one who remembers the beginning of Thucydides' *Histories,* where he says of the early Greeks that

> For in early times the Hellenes and the barbarians of the coast and islands, as communication by sea became more common, were tempted to turn pirates, under the conduct of their most powerful men; the motives being to serve their own cupidity and to support the needy. They would fall upon a town unprotected by walls, and consisting of a mere collection of villages, and would plunder it; *indeed, this came to be the main source of their livelihood, no disgrace being yet attached to such an achievement, but even some glory.* An illustration of this is furnished by the honour with which some of the inhabitants of the continent still regard a successful marauder, and by the question we find the *old poets everywhere representing the people as asking of voyagers- "Are they pirates?"- as if those who are asked the question would have no idea of disclaiming the imputation, or their interrogators of reproaching them for it. The same rapine prevailed also by land.* And even at the present day many of Hellas still follow the old fashion, the Ozolian Locrians for instance, the Aetolians, the Acarnanians, and that region of the continent; and the custom of carrying arms is still kept up among these continentals, from the old piratical habits. The whole of Hellas used once to carry arms, their habitations being unprotected and their communication with each other unsafe; indeed, to wear arms was as much a part of everyday life with them as with the barbarians. And the fact that the people in these parts of Hellas are still living in the old way points to a time when the same mode of life was once equally common to all.[50]

Thucydides' reference to Homer indicates the remote antiquity of this piratical, nomadic attitude. To this end Thucydides could have perhaps quoted that

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[48] Tacitus *Germania* 14
[49] ibid 23
[50] Thucydides *History* 1.5-6

part of Odysseus' speech, where he refers proudly to a certain way of life that must have been instantly recognizable to his audience: "Work was never a pleasure for me, nor home-keeping thrift, which nourishes good children. But for me oared ships were always a pleasure, and wars, and well-polished spears and arrows."[51] Not merely the love of war and adventure, but the rejection of work, of home-keeping domesticity, the raising of children, the rejection of the whole world of preservation and mere life around which the primitive *nomos* is oriented. All later aristocracies, indeed, even if they did not go to the extreme of valuing pillage and piracy, maintained an antagonistic attitude to the peasant, the serf, the tiller of the soil and the preservation of mere life. The famous motto of the Roman aristocracy was "Bellum et Otium"; in marked distinction, of course, to the later Christian "Ora et Labora."[52]

Related to this disdain for farming in a very direct way, and indeed, as I will show, constitutive of the aristocratic morality in an important way, is the often *pastoral* origin of a conquering elite. The examples just mentioned, but several more besides, suggest that aristocracy is imposed on a native, static farming population by a mobile pastoral tribe. Many reasons have been put forth to explain this phenomenon, and there is possibly some truth in all of them. In an argument that consists of simple biological determinism, it has been noted that a pastoral diet of milk, meat, cheese, and occasional wild fruit—much like Tacitus ascribed to the then still semi-nomadic ancient Germanic tribes—is far healthier than a diet of grains and will produce a taller, larger, more robust class of warriors. Many purely historically

[51] Homer *Odyssey* XIV.222-225; see Drews 1972
[52] See Nietzsche GS 329

farming populations in the world have not even developed lactose tolerance, and therefore can only receive protein and calcium from limited sources; whereas a tribe that subsists mainly on milk and dairy enjoys advantages in height, strength, and overall health. Consequently as a matter of physical anthropology, the skeletons of steppe, mountain, or hill-dwelling populations have been far more robust than those of farmers who live in valleys and fertile plains or river basins. Gracilization of the skeleton develops after a population settles down into an agricultural way of life, whether because of diet or other reasons.[53]

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[53] Regarding the claims in this paragraph, especially as concerns gracilization of sedentary Neolithic farmers' skeletons as opposed to the more robust "primitive" features of the steppe pastoralists and hunters consider the following:

Arthur J. Robston, (2010). "A bioeconomic view of the Neolithic transition to agriculture." *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d'économique* 43(1): 280–300:

Adoption of agriculture at the expense of hunting and gathering was the dramatic precondition for all modern civilization. **Recent data suggest that, because of this transition, humans initially were more disease prone, smaller, less nourished, and shorterlived.** To explain why individuals chose agriculture over hunting and gathering, this paper develops a simple model of the evolution of preferences over the quality and quantity of children, as would have been generated by our long history as a species. These preferences would have induced the choice of agriculture, but also would have led to these otherwise puzzling health effects.

Helen M. Leach, (2003). "Human Domestication Reconsidered." *Current Anthropology* 44(3): 349–368:

In scientific usage, "domestication" has come to mean the process by which humans transformed wild animals and plants into more useful products through control of their breeding. Certain physical and behavioural changes have been identified as criteria of domestication. They include morphological changes affecting the skeletons of early Middle Eastern domesticates (e.g., reduction in size and skeletal robusticity, cranio-facial shortening, and declining tooth size). **These changes also occur in some human populations starting in the Late Pleistocene.** "Unconscious selection" pressures are increasingly invoked in explanations of both sets of data. The long-established paradigm of human control over domestication through artificial selection has meant that parallelism in these changes is seldom noted and few inclusive explanations have been attempted since the early 1900s. Recently, only symbolic and social domestication has been accepted for Homo sapiens. This article proposes a preliminary case for human biological domestication based on the effects of the built environment, decreased mobility, and changes in diet consistency associated with increasing sedentism...**As human mobility, both logistic and residential** (Holliday and Falsetti 1995: 149–50), **declined in the early Neolithic period,** activity levels of the domestic herd animals might be expected to have followed. They no longer needed to flee the approaching human or carnivore predator, and their feeding range became confined to the territory controlled by the household or the village.

Vaclav Vancata, & Martina Charvatova, (2001). "Post-palaeolithic *Homo sapiens* evolution in central Europe: Changes in body size and proportions in the Neolithic and early Bronze Age" *Anthropologie,* 39(2–3): 133-152:

To explain the martial dominance by pastoral peoples over farming peoples, other writers have focused on the fact that among pastoral populations, wealth (measured in herds, head of cattle, etc.) is highly mobile and therefore easy to steal and rob; the "cattle raid" becomes a central "institution" of pastoral existence, and therefore the development of a warlike and piratical way of life is encouraged, for purposes of both defense and offense.[54] A life on the move, often in difficult country, in any case encourages the development of physical and moral qualities that are conducive to martial prowess; for which likely reason plains-dwelling, farming populations have always recognized their hill- or mountain-dwelling neighbors as

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The Early Bronze Age population from Bajc is similar to other Bronze Age groups with the exception that the tibia is significantly longer in the Bajc sample. One of the important questions is which changes, if any, in body build and proportions emerged after the Neolithic to Bronze Age transition. **Early Bronze Age population males are relatively tall and robust, while the females are significantly smaller than the males but still are relatively tall and robust in comparison to the females of the Linear Band Pottery Culture and Lengyel Culture [these are canonical European Neolithic farming cultures].** We have found marked similarities among Únětice early Bronze Age Culture, Bell Beaker Culture and Corded Ware Culture populations with the exception of Corded Ware Culture females that are somewhat more gracile...

See also David Anthony Princeton 2007 p. 349:

Usatovo covered about 4–5 ha. A stone defensive wall probably defended the town on its seaward side. The settlement was largely destroyed by modern village construction and limestone quarrying prior to the first excavation by M. F. Boltenko in 1921, but parts of it survived (figure 14.2). Behind the ancient town four separate cemeteries crowned the hillcrest, all of them broadly contemporary. Two were kurgan cemeteries and two were flat-grave cemeteries. In one of the kurgan cemeteries, the one closest to the town, half the central graves contained men buried with bronze daggers and axes. These bronze weapons occurred in no other graves, not even in the second kurgan cemetery. Female figurines were limited to the flat-grave cemeteries and the settlement, never occurring in the kurgan graves. The flat-grave cemeteries were similar to flat-grave cemeteries that appeared outside Tripolye villages in the uplands, notably at Vikhvatinskii on the Dniester, **where excavation of perhaps one-third of the cemetery yielded sixty-one graves of people with a gracile Mediterranean skull-and-face configuration.** Upland cemeteries appeared at several other Tripolye sites (Holerkani, Ryşeşti, and Danku) located at the border between the steppes and the rainfall agriculture zone in the forest-steppe.

Mallory 1991, p. 191 "The great number of burials also provides considerable evidence for the physical type of the Dnieper-Donets [steppe] population. They are predominantly characterized as late Cro-Magnons with more massive and robust features than the gracile mediterranean peoples of the Balkan Neolithic."

[54] This is the general argument in Cochran & Harpending 2010 p. 177-86

more formidable warriors—whether one considers 19th century India, or 3d century BC Rome.[55]

Possibly related, and in any case very revealing at least of the "pastoral" attitude alone, is the high value that Biblical morality seems to place on the simple, pure way of life of the pastoralist, as opposed to the corrupt way of life of the city-dweller, and the farmer, whose art is a necessity for the city. God accepted the pastoral offering of Abel, not the farmer's offering of Cain—and the descendants of the latter are the founders of cities and the arts.[56] The attitude among primitive Indo-European peoples is similar, especially in areas of Afghanistan where primitive attitudes have persisted as if fossilized, nearly to our day. The following passage is very revealing regarding the connection between pastoral way of life, and the aristocratic sensibility that I am trying to explain,

> The Nuristanis [prior to Islamization 100 years ago] had managed for centuries to preserve their traditions and status-enhancing activities like feasting and head- or trophy-hunting, keeping alive beliefs and ceremonies, some of which may be compared to those of Vedic India. Traditionally there are two social classes of Nuristanis in the Waigal valley: the ruling class of landowning livestock herders...and the socially low-status, formerly enslaved, artisans and servants. The ruling class formed a basically egalitarian society with a strong emphasis on rank, corresponding to merit achieved by warfare, social competence, and feast giving.[57] ...the world system as the Kafirs [Nuristanis] saw it was characterized by a radical dualism of sacred and profane, or pure and impure, and consequently male and female, high and low, right and left, *animal husbandry and field work.* Everything in the valley is subject to this concept. The mountain tops are considered more pure than the valleys, wild goats more than domestic animals...The world was thus divided between sacred-pure versus the profane-impure...The specific polarity of male-female...was closely associated with upper-lower, mountain-valley, right-left, light-dark, cold-hot, raw-cooked...*The high, light-filled zones of the world, in proximity to the deities with their "pure" animals...were considered the male realm, while the "impure" low zones of the valleys and streams were regarded as the female spheres.* Accordingly a rigid division of labor assigned the tending of animals, especially goats, dairy productions, and, naturally, all the public, religious, and martial duties to men. When staying with the animals on the high mountain pastures the men believed they went through a purifying phase,

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[55] The reference is to the feared Gurkhas and Samnites respectively; "martial races" of the hills; on the former see Lionel Caplan "'Bravest of the Brave': Representations of 'The Gurkha' in British Military Writings" *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 25, No. 3 (Jul., 1991), pp. 571-597

[56] See e.g., Strauss IPP p. 279-80 on Cain and Abel

[57] Note again the *exact* parallel to the Homeric virtues of *andreia* (warfare, manliness in battle), *phronesis* (social competence, political acumen, giving good advice in assembly); as for feast-giving in the *Iliad,* this requires little comment.

*ridding themselves of the pollution down in the life of the communities, a life full of strife and refuse, permanently exposed to disruption and contamination.* Women had to stay in the villages and valleys to perform household chores and farming. Sacred areas, houses, and objects, as well as goats were taboo for them and for members of the lowest classes, especially the "impure" outcast and slave-like *bari* and *shuwala.*[58]

Few things better reflect the complex of concepts or ideas underlying the aristocratic disdain for the sedentary, valley-dwelling, impure, effeminate and unmartial farmer beholden to everyday necessity and the drudgery of life, than the primitive attitude of the Nuristani male pastoralist.

The *specific* "pastoral" attitude represented in the passage just quoted was preserved almost to the letter in Greek aristocratic orientation as well. Furthermore it bears directly on an important element of the philosophic and tyrannical type that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. There is a very striking way in which this specifically pastoral origin of the "aristocratic *prejudice,*" to put it in Kojeve's words, is preserved through centuries of Greek history. The contempt for settled life "in the valleys" and the city, accompanied by a sense that the man who sojourns in the wild outside the bounds of the city by himself communes, not only with sacred powers, but specifically with a purifying, liberating, revitalizing primal force reappears in Greek myth and in Greek aristocratic attitude in several characteristic ways. Machiavelli himself famously comments on how it was "secretly taught to princes by ancient writers, who describe how Achilles and many other princes of old were given to the Centaur Chiron to nurse [in the wilderness], who brought them up in his discipline; which means solely that...they had for a teacher

[58] Almuth Degener, "Hunter's Lore in Nuristan," *Asian Folklore Studies* vol. 60 no. 2 2001, pgs 337-8; emphasis added.

one who was half beast and half man."[59] A more vivid and revealing image of this principle regarding Achilles specifically, but also others, appears, as we will see, in the poetic work of Pindar. Plato's Socrates, as discussed in the following chapters, is also repeatedly referred to as *agrios,* "of the wilderness" and exhibits, both in Plato and Xenophon, untamed, "unsettled" and "uncitylike" behaviors and attitudes that are elsewhere attributed to wild and uncivilized tribesmen and beings of the wilderness.

It is only out of an ancient intuition or inherited assumption of some kind that a superior principle of life and being existed outside the city bounds and human enactments, outside *nomos,* that the concept of nature could be born in the first place: the first mention of *phusis* is as regards the nature of a herb hidden deep in the wilderness, revealed to Odysseus only by the god Hermes, a nomad and transgressor of boundaries.[60] (That the first reference of *phusis* is as regards a healing herb in the wilderness is especially telling: Pindar, indeed, identifies no other than the horse-man Chiron as the originator of the knowledge of the healing arts among men).[61] The aristocratic-pastoralist contempt for the limitations of city life, and therefore of *nomos,* is what possibly allowed for the development of the idea of nature, understood first as a primal, secret knowledge outside the bounds of

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[59] Machiavelli *Prince* XVIII

[60] At *Odyssey* 10.303; I discuss this and the parallel and revealing mention of *phusis* in the *Iliad,* below; furthermore the fact that the Greeks assumed Mt. Olympus was the seat of their gods, who were also associated with the sky, the sacrality of mountain peaks in general, marks them apart from pre-Greek "old European" chthonic deities of the Earth, hearth, and agrarian village, who had been defeated and subdued by the Olympians. This is roughly the well-known view of Gimbutas regarding the religion of "old Europe."

[61] Pindar *Nemean* 3; see the next chapter

the city and of *nomos,* to be revealed by demonic beings, beast-men or horse-men, inhabiting the hills and mountains.

In this connection, there is still another great reason why the pastoral way of life is important to the aristocratic morality, and to the emergence of the idea of nature. This has to do with the matter of *breeding.* Aristocrats of pastoralist origin would be especially sensitive to the reality of breeding stocks, to the principles of animal husbandry and of the necessity of eugenic measures for the improvement of herd or specimen quality. Such attitudes and knowledge are likely to persist for the longest time even after the initial conquering population has "settled down" among the conquered, and perhaps even fused with them: it is likely to be passed down at least as part of an ancestral "aristocratic sensibility," much like horse-riding had been passed down from the remotest antiquity among aristocrats, whether in archaic Greece or medieval Europe, for example. Thus we find that Greek aristocrats in Plato's time enjoyed especially the past-time of breeding animals—

> The selective breeding of sporting and ornamental animals was one of the characteristic hobbies of an Athenian gentleman. Glaucon, Plato's brother, was an enthusiastic breeder of animals; Plato's step-father Pyrilampes was renowned for his peacocks. Once it is accepted that the analogy of animal breeding has a relevance to the procreation of mankind, it begins to seem paradoxical that human eugenics are so neglected, and reason suggests a new society should embody some eugenic provisions. These, however, clearly cannot be made effective without some firmness on the part of the rulers of the *polis,* a firmness, which, however, conceals itself with secrecy...[62]

There will be plenty of opportunity to consider this side of Plato later. One may also add copious examples from Xenophon on this same fascination with and knowledge of breeding animals.[63]

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[62] H.D. Rankin, "Plato's Eugenic *Euphemia* and *Apothesis* in *Republic* Book V" *Hermes* 93 4 1965, p 417

The idea of breeding is then possibly the one great, decisive way that a principle different from that inherent in the "fundamental democracy" of primitive society develops in the first place. The principle behind the primitive "fundamental democracy" is rather one of *taming.* Where the early "democracy" is based on the leveling of all human differences under the absolute law of the ancestral, where the question is one of the preservation of the community, and therefore law or regime is synonymous with the *taming* of human nature, by contrast within aristocratic culture of pastoral origin, a principle different from the preservation of mere life begins to take shape concretely in the attempt to *breed* different human types and "improve" the stock, or more precisely, to breed one perfect human specimen. "Biological" preservation is replaced by "biological" improvement of quality.

I hold it as partly established then that the only way that a principle different from and antagonistic to the early "fundamental democracy" could have developed is through conquest by a foreign tribe. And that such a principle develops most easily when this tribe is warlike and pastoral, whereas the natives are sedentary farmers. Certain members of the conquering tribe henceforth raise themselves

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[63] Especially relevant is the beginning of Xenophon's treatise *On Hunting With Dogs:*

Game and hounds are the invention of gods, of Apollo and Artemis. They bestowed it on Cheiron and honoured him therewith for his righteousness. And he, receiving it, rejoiced in the gift, and used it. And he had for pupils in venery and in other noble pursuits—Cephalus, Asclepius, Meilanion, Nestor, Amphiaraus, Peleus, Telamon, Meleager, Theseus, Hippolytus, Palamedes, Odysseus, Menestheus, Diomedes, Castor, Polydeuces, Machaon, Podaleirius, Antilochus, Aeneas, Achilles, of whom each in his time was honoured by gods... Peleus stirred a desire even in the gods to give him Thetis and to hymn their marriage in Cheiron's home... Castor and Polydeuces, through the renown that they won by displaying in Greece the arts they learned of Cheiron, are immortal. Machaon and Podaleirius, schooled in all the selfsame arts, proved in crafts and reasonings and wars good men...

In other words, as we shall see also especially in Pindar, the wild man centaur Chiron is a matchmaker (breeder) and educator or trainer of military genius. Much of Xenophon's treatise of course is also much concerned with the proper breeding and training of dogs. The connection between the two programs of breeding and training seems to be quite explicit.

above the needs of providing for mere life, and introduce a principle of hierarchy among human types, a principle according to which the conquered are associated with mere life and everything that symbolizes this, and the conquerors with freedom from the fear of death, from the need to provide for daily life, and on the positive side with leisure, military power, and glory. That, in its final development, this principle takes the form of an analogy to animal *breeding,* in distinction to the native morality that was founded on leveling, cultivation to hard labor and field work, docility, self-preservation, and therefore could be understood as an analogy to *taming.* Like the Tutsi nobles in our own time, such aristocracies see themselves typically as "intelligent, astute in political intrigue, born to command, refined, courageous, and cruel," an attitude much refined in the aristocratic Greek virtues of *phronesis* and *andreia.*[64]

The phenomenon of aristocracy-formation through foreign conquest is possibly much more widespread than it appears to be, if indeed it is not universal. This is because in many cases the conquering elite probably went to some length to hide its foreign origins, and adopted instead convoluted mythologies of ethnogenesis and unity with the conquered. This is true even in a case like India, where the Law of Manu sought to preserve racial differences as far as this was possible; yet the foreign origins of the conquerors were hidden under a network of

[64] See below, Chapter 2 on Pindar, where the "primitive" heroic aristocratic virtues are refined and elaborated in the context of a teaching on nature.

religious myths that justified the caste system, including, brazenly, its probably racial measures.[65]

In a few cases, such as Rwanda, where conqueror and conquered were initially so different and where no attempt seemingly was made to cover up this difference, the conquering elite continued to rule outside the society of the governed and, despite some mixing at the edges—talented Hutu were probably allowed to marry into the Tutsi nobility—a marked ethnic difference between ruler and ruled has persisted. But as the history of that country shows, this is a politically risky choice for the nobility. By contrast Portuguese colonial policy deliberately promoted a myth of miscegenation and multiculturalism as a legitimation of rule, well-known by the name of *lusotropicalism*; but, as the case of Angola among others shows, the population that was actually mixed never exceeded the 2-3% mark, and this population remained in an intermediate managerial social position between the native ruled and the largely colonial rulers.[66] Nevertheless, the powerful myth served for the maintenance of public peace, and although former Portuguese colonies in some cases, like Brazil, continue to be racially very stratified, they experience relatively low levels of ethnic or racial conflict. By contrast, in the case of Guatemala, where the ruling population kept a very distinct ethnic and racial identity from the ruled and where no public myth of unity or multiracialism (or anything else) was promoted, the result was a long and bloody ethnic civil war

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[65] See Nietzsche TWI "On the Improvers of Mankind" 3-5, see also Chitra Tiwari *Sudras in Manu* Delhi 1963

[66] Gerald Bender, *Angola Under the Portuguese,* 1978, pp. 1-51; this book in general contains a good, if hostile, discussion of the "Machiavellian" strategy of *lusotropicalism* used by Portuguese colonialism.

where many died on both sides.[67] A similar state of affairs may develop in Bolivia, where the central government, now in the hands of the native majority, aggressively declaims against the historical depredations of the "colonial" element, while the largely Spanish minority in the rich city of Santa Cruz just as aggressively now demands its autonomy, or even hints at secession.[68]

The persistence across large periods of time of a consciousness of a separate origin among the ruled on one hand, and the rulers on the other, is of course possible even in cases where the rulers attempted to justify their position in the most creative ways. The Normans, as a hostile elite in many places across medieval Europe, famously had recourse to the most convoluted mythologies regarding national origins, in order to erase their foreign provenance and legitimize their rule. Yet as successful as this task was in many cases, the persistence of an antagonistic Anglo-Saxon consciousness on the part of the conquered as late as the American Revolution[69] and as late as the novel *Ivanhoe,* nevertheless shows how difficult it is

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[67] The rebel army "Guerilla Army of the Poor" had its social base in the indigenous Maya. See also Rosemary Thorp, Corinne Caumartin and George Gray-Molina "Inequality, Ethnicity, Political Mobilisation and Political Violence in Latin America: The Cases of Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru" *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), pp. 453-480

[68] The conflict is well-known but see e.g., Bret Gustafson "Manipulating Cartographies: Plurinationalism, Autonomy, and Indigenous Resurgence in Bolivia" *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 82, No. 4 (Fall, 2009), pp. 985-1016

[69] Jefferson wanted to put Hengist and Horsa, the legendary Saxon settlers of Britain on the first seal of the United States, with an engraving "Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon chiefs from whom we claim the honor of being descended, and whose political principles and form of government we have assumed." As quoted in Laura Kendrick, "The American Middle Ages" in *The Middle Ages after the Middle Ages in the English Speaking World* ed. Alamichel, Brewer 1997 pp. 125-6:

> Jefferson had already used the Saxon precedent to argue for the natural right under universal law of a people to leave their native land and set up a free government elsewhere...The writer of the Declaration of Independence wanted to restore and revitalize, in the new American setting, pre-eighth-century Saxon laws he believed had been corrupted over the course of subsequent British history, beginning with the imposition of feudal law at the Norman Conquest. Toward the end of *A Summary View* Jefferson rejected as "inappropriate" the application of post-Conquest British law in America, on the grounds that "America was not conquered by William the Norman, nor its lands surrendered to him, or any of his successors." Jefferson was not alone in the belief that America offered a chance to do history right this time by preserving Saxon liberty and democracy.

for an aristocracy to erase the fact that it must almost always, if not always, be "grafted" on top of a native population. But even in those places where the aristocracy manages to erase its foreign origin, or when this origin is forgotten simply by passage of time,[70] the very convoluted and distinct mythology of some national cultures betrays the original act of "foundation" rather as one of conquest and usurpation.[71]

One could say that it is not relevant *how* Greek aristocratic morality developed; its existence by the Archaic and Classical age, by historical times, is not debatable, and it is possible to understand its important elements simply by studying Homer, Pindar, and later political philosophers who comment on the same

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[70] It is interesting how this process is sometimes turned upside down: the Chinese case is telling. Although the Ming Dynasty is almost the *only* native Han dynasty in the last millennium—the rest having been founded by Jurchen, Manchu, Mongol, or other pastoral steppe conquerors—the famous ability of this civilization to absorb and assimilate the conquerors to the conquered leads to a situation where, e.g., Genghis Khan is considered a "great Chinese general," and so forth; or where Tibet, which enjoyed a feudal relationship of near equality with the last Manchu dynasty is now considered an ancient and integral part of the Chinese culture and civilization, whereas there was historically great hostility and often war between Tibetans and Han, the Tibetan warbands at one time having sacked the Chinese capital Chang'an ("Perpetual Peace"). See Ben Hillman and Lee-Ann Henfry "Macho Minority: Masculinity and Ethnicity on the Edge of Tibet," *Modern China* 2006 32; 251

Female Han Chinese respondents also emphasized physicality in their descriptions of Tibetan men, whom they described as having strong bodies and as being very manly, handsome, and brave. The women viewed the Tibetans as bigger, taller, stronger, darker-skinned, rougher, more masculine, and more loyal than other men... instead of describing the masculine in reference to the feminine, Tibetan men repeatedly contrasted their masculinity with that of Han Chinese men.

See below, Chapter 4 section II.a where the matter of tanning and physicality is discussed in the context of Greek aristocratic virtues in terms that are almost exactly the same, and where Greek aristocrats in Xenophon's *Agesilaus* contrast their own manliness to the effeminacy of the untanned, unphysical, oligarchic Persians.

[71] For a recent scholarly treatment of the Greek case see especially Margalit Finkelberg *Greeks and Pre-Greeks: Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition* Cambridge 2005, where the author treats a process of ethnogenesis through conquest similar to the one described here. The persistent Greek myth of the hero-founder who comes from abroad and marries the daughter of the local king, thereby inheriting the kingship, is given great weight. According to Finkelberg the Greeks, while acknowledging rather explicitly their foreign origins, nevertheless managed to accomplish a relatively successful fusion with local elites. And while ethnic tensions persisted over time, e.g., between Dorian and non-Dorian, the original founding conquest was covered up rather successfully in the shroud of myth.

matter. But although this dissertation does cover such texts, the particular and peculiar origins, in prehistoric times, of the Greek aristocratic mentality are also important. The reason these origins are important is because in the "radicalization" of Greek aristocratic morality that I claim is at the bottom of the emergence of both philosophy and tyranny, certain very primitive elements and attitudes resurface, elements which had perhaps been tempered or previously restrained by city life and by compromise with alternative customs, in particular the prior, native, non-aristocratic morality. So it is important to look, even if briefly, at the very earliest development of Greek aristocracy and its peculiar features that may have served as prerequisites or preconditions for the emergence either of the idea of nature or actually for the possibility of the philosophical life.

So far we have considered the general attitudes, qualities, and way of life common among aristocracies of a pastoral origin, to try to understand how an alternative to the original "totalitarian democracy" of the primal *nomos* could have developed. We have also considered briefly the possibility that it is through the interest and practice of breeding (beginning with breeding livestock, but also horses, dogs, and other animals), that a standard different from and even opposite to the *nomos* of the "primitive commune" could have developed. Now let us briefly consider a third and even more specific institution of pastoral aristocratic society that could have, again, presented a model or principle of life separate from and even antagonistic to *nomos* or convention. This is the institution of the warband, or the warrior band of youth.

Nearly all pastoral societies with a tradition of war and raiding, and certainly those of Eurasia—whether Turkic or Indo-European—have a unique institution known as the warband. It is found in no other cultural-linguistic complex: it consists of an independent military class, in particular one composed of bands of unmarried youths.[72] Tacitus describes aspects of this institution that had survived among the Germanic tribes of his day, which he renders in an especially vivid way:

> Admirably adapted to the action of [running alongside the cavalry] is the swiftness of certain foot-soldiers, who are picked from the entire youth of their country, and stationed in front of the line. Their number is fixed -- a hundred from each canton; and from this they take their name among their countrymen, so that what was originally a mere number has now become a title of distinction... *If their native state sinks into the sloth of prolonged peace and repose, many of its noble youths voluntarily seek those tribes which are waging some war,* both because inaction is odious to their race, and because they win renown more readily in the midst of peril, and cannot maintain a numerous following except by violence and war. Indeed, men look to the liberality of their chief for their war-horse and their bloodstained and victorious lance. Feasts and entertainments, which, though inelegant, are plentifully furnished, are their only pay. The means of this bounty come from war and rapine.[73]

He adds, especially concerning of a custom among the Chatti's *comitatus,* or war band, that,

> To begin the battle always rests with *them; they* form the first line, an unusual spectacle. Nor even in peace do they assume a more civilised aspect. They have no home or land or occupation; they are supported by whomsoever they visit, as lavish of the property of others as they are regardless of their own, till at length the feebleness of age makes them unequal to so stern a valour.[74]

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[72] Numerous studies of this institution exist, among which the most prominent are: for the Turkic and Mongol *nokod,* "companions," see Boris Vladimirtsov, *Le regime social des Mongols; le feudalisme nomade* Paris 1948 pp. 110-8 and also Thomas T. Allsen, "Guard and Government in the Reign of The Grand Qan Möngke, 1251-59" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol. 46, No. 2 (Dec., 1986), p 513 where Vladimirtsov book is mentioned and the *nokod* is briefly discussed for the Mongol case. Dumezil's own *Aspects de la fonction guerrière chez les Indo-Européens,* 1956; Stig Wikander *Der arische Männerbund : Studien zur indo-iranischen Sprach- und Religionsgeschichte,* 1938; see also Michael Speidel, "Berserks: a History of Indo-European 'Mad Warriors'" *Journal of World History,* Vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall, 2002), pp. 253-290, etc.; the only exception would appear to be the independent *samurai* warrior class of Japan, but in fact the latest scholarship in Japan supports a steppe (mixed Altaic-Scythian) origin for this institution as well, see C. Scott Littleton "Susa-nö-wo versus Ya-mata nö woröti: An Indo-European Theme in Japanese Mythology," *History of Religions,* vol 20 no 3 1981

[73] Tacitus *Germania* 6, 14 emphasis added

[74] Tacitus *Germania* 31

Tacitus' account is hardly the only example, though. The same institution existed arguably in very early Rome—Romulus' *comitatus* was such a warband—and in the most primitive period of Greece.[75] The war band of youths that live outside the rest of the tribe is associated across cultures with the totemic symbol of the wolf—Romulus' and Remus' being reared by a wolf is not unique by any means—and in general with "wolfish" images or themes.[76] An image of this phenomenon exists in the *Iliad* in the form of Achilles' war band, especially in Book XVI, where they are compared to a band of wolves.[77] Sparta, which was likely founded by a Dorian warband and which existed to support such a warband parasitically, had for its founder Lycurgus, the "wolf-worker."

This then is yet another cultural feature by virtue of which the Greek mind was able to move beyond the strictures and absolute rule of ancestral *nomos,* beyond the primitive "rule of elders" that characterizes all early society, and that, again, seemingly provides no "out" from within. The *comitatus* was literally independent and not under the control of tribal elders—it represents an important, and perhaps unique, exception to the ubiquity of ancestral *nomos* or custom that we have seen both Frazer and Strauss describe in some detail. Furthermore the warband was understood to be essentially lawless, and of the wilderness—initiation into the warband meant life with companions in the wilderness. The youths saw

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[75] For Rome see Andreas Alfoldi, *The Structure of the Pre-Etruscan Roman State* 1974 especially chapters on the Lupercalia and the *comitatus.*

[76] For the most comprehensive study of this phenomenon, besides that of Stig Wikander, see the recent book by Daniel Gershenson, *Apollo the Wolf-God,* 1991 especially chapters 6 and 7, "The Wolf and Death," and "Werewolf Cofraternities and Wind Evidence," which have been very useful for my discussion here.

[77] See also Olga Merck Davidson, "Dolon and Rhesus in the "Iliad"", *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, New Series, Vol. 1, (1979), pp. 61-66

themselves as wild dogs or wolves, and inhabited by the wilderness, outside the bounds of tribal convention. The warband was mythically associated with shape-shifting, "exernality," the transgression of boundaries between the dead and the living, and so on.[78] In fine, it represented in every way a transgression of *nomos* and its bounds as such, it enthusiastically embraced, not the preservation of mere life, but in fact death and a vital, martial, orgiastic element that was believed to reside in the wilderness, outside the boundaries home and of the tribe.[79]

This dangerous cultural institution, that could become a calamity for the tribe itself at any time—could it be that, aside from offering, as such, a model for "life outside convention" or a principle that is opposed to convention—could it be that it also forms the cultural prototype for the philosophical *school* or *sect?*[80] And also forms the prototype for the piratical tyrant and his bodyguard or war band, above all law and all responsibility to home and hearth? Certainly it appears that

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[78] For a recent discussion of this phenomenon see David Anthony and Dorcas Brown "Midwinter dog sacrifices and warrior initiations in the Late Bronze Age at the site of Krasnosamarskoe, Russia," December 2012 U. Copenhagen ; they connect this archaeological site with a ritual described in the Vedas.

[79] See especially Gershenson 1991 chapters, "The Wolf and Death," and "Werewolf Cofraternities and Wind Evidence"

[80] This is entirely plausible since there is some evidence that the steppe warband served as the direct basis for monastic life, in particular for Tibetan monasticism. It is then entirely plausible that as a model of a community of men dedicated to virtue outside the bounds of the community and outside all domestic life, the warband could have served a similar "founding" function for the philosophical sect or school. See Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present.* Princeton 2009 pp. 151–152:

> In the Tibetan Empire, due to the paucity of source material it is difficult to say how long the comitatus was maintained as such after the adoption of Buddhism, but it seems clear that at least to a certain extent it was transmuted into a monastic form. The Tibetans' chosen form of Buddhism emphasized devotion to a spiritual teacher. This devotion was little different from that of the comitatus members to their lord. When the Tibetan emperor was proclaimed to be a Buddhist ruler—a dharmarâja 'religious king' or cakravartin 'one who turns the wheel (of the Buddhist law)'—the monks were ultimately in his service. It is not surprising then to find that monks fought in the army in the late imperial period. By the end of the Early Middle Ages there was a large monastic establishment in the Tibetan Empire.

Plato himself connected the tyrant to the "wolfish man," and in turn both to the fraternity of young warriors.[81]

Finally, it should be mentioned that a recent historical study of the remotest Greek antiquity and pre-history also supports the model presented above regarding the character of the Greek aristocracy and in particular regarding the matter of how it came already "equipped" with certain attitudes and orientations that made possible the emergence of a principle opposite to and above primeval *nomos.*

In his remarkable book *The Coming of the Greeks*[82] Robert Drews makes the case for a takeover of the Greek mainland around 1600 BC by a small Near Eastern charioteering elite (analogous e.g., to the better-documented case of the mountain-dwelling Kassites who took over Mesopotamia around the same time, again owing to their charioteering skill). The book is interesting for the development of our argument here because it contains certain striking passages regarding the origins of

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[81] The case is made explicitly by Barton Kunstler "The Werewolf Figure and Its Adoption into the Greek Political Vocabulary" *The Classical World* Vol. 84, No. 3 (Jan. - Feb., 1991), pp. 189-205:

Ritual and mythic patterns belonging to secret male military societies, whose members often considered themselves werewolves, were used in legend and by Greek thinkers, including Plato, to describe and analyze the role played by tyrants in the early history of the polis. In addition, the legend of the Spartan lawgiver and potential tyrant, Lukourgos, is spun out of a traditional pattern of werewolf behavior in myth and ritual.... Plato opens his discussion of the tyrant in the Republic by describing the werewolf ritual of Mt. Lukaion in Arkadia, in which human flesh was mixed with other sacrificial cuts and a group of men partook of the offerings. The one who tasted the human splangkhna became a wolf (R. 565d-566d). Polybius (7.13.7), Pliny (NH 8.81-82), Pausanias (6.8.2; 8.2.3,6), and St. Augustine (CD18.17) provide further details.....The accounts clearly describe a werewolf society initiation which Plato used to clarify his analysis of tyranny. Plato structures his entire account of the tyrant's rise around the character of the werewolf and the ideas that the werewolf conjured up in the Greek political...As Plato's analysis reveals, the vocabulary of werewolf rites came to be applied to the tyrants. Political ideas took a long time to emerge, linguistically and institutionally, from their mythoreligious background. The tyrant, seen as abusing legal and political institutions for his own ends and reformulating time and dike, could logically be referred back to the more archaic figure of a werewolf outlaw, an eater of unholy portions of human meat at the sacrificial table at which a more primitive time was allocated. Both werewolf and tyrant devoured unconsecrated portions of communal sacrifice and fed off essential human substance.... It was Plato, finally, who made the equation between werewolf and tyrant explicit, but the legends of the rise of the early tyrants contain compelling evidence that the Greeks used the vocabulary and structural patterns of werewolf myth and cult to analyze and characterize the nature of the tyrannies. (194-201)

[82] All subsequent citations and discussion refers to this edition, Robert Drews, *The Coming of the Greeks* Princeton 1988

the proto-Greeks and, by comparison with other Near Eastern military aristocracies, the character of their rule; I quote here merely some of his conclusions:

> Their bones show that the men buried in the shaft graves at Mycenae were big men, taller and broader than the typical inhabitants of Middle Helladic Greece. The men were also charioteers...Possession of horse and chariots seems to have been not an incidental, but a fundamental feature of Shaft Grave Mycenae, enabling to Myceneans to do whatever else they did. ...The shaft-grave princes [at Mycenae] belonged to an international elite. The same was true of the charioteers who took over lands in the Fertile Crescent. The Indo-European and Hurrian princes in the Levant maintained surprisingly close connections with each other over distances of hundreds of miles, exchanging not only lavish gifts but also daughters and sisters in marriage. Similarly, the Kassite aristocracy of southern Mesopotamia, held together by gifts, correspondence, and an interest in chariotry, was also assiduous in cultivating personal and diplomatic relations with the rulers of lands as far away as Egypt. The *hyksos* rulers in Egypt, at the beginning of the sixteenth century BC, seem to have been in touch with Crete as well as with Mesopotamia and, of course, the Levant. (In contrast, Mesopotamian and Egyptian kings in the eighteenth century BC were relatively parochial: in the voluminous documentation for Mesopotamia in the Age of Hammurabi there is no mention of Egypt.) The rulers of Mitanni and the imperial kings of Hatti likewise had close personal and diplomatic ties with their peers in other lands. James Breasted fittingly named the Late Bronze Age "The First International Civilization." ...**In utter contrast with the provincialism of Middle Helladic Greece, the shaft-grave dynasties [the first Greeks] delighted in the foreign and the exotic**...In addition to the influences and imports from Crete, Egypt, Anatolia, and the Fertile Crescent, there is the gold. There are no gold mines in the Argolid, and the gold buried in the shaft graves necessarily came from far away, undoubtedly exchanged for more utilitarian commodities that the dynasts had squeezed from the subject population of the Argolid. The tastes of the new rulers at Mycenae have with reason been characterized as vulgar and barbarous, but they were indisputably cosmopolitan ...Nevertheless, we may still suppose that when PIE speakers took over the best parts of the Greek mainland—a land that seems to have had almost no political organization, and a populace that seems to have set little store by military prowess—they controled an alien population perhaps ten times as large as their own. Such was the ratio of helots to Spartiates at a much later time, and even the Greeks who took over a relatively well-organized Knossos ca. 1450 BC may not have numbered over a tenth of their Minoan subjects.[83]

This account rather specifically supports the claims presented above regarding the origins of an aristocratic way of life or morality in the imposition of order from above, an imposition carried out by an alien, numerically smaller elite on a numerically much larger population, which is unmartial and parochial; this passage furthermore emphasizes that the conqueror and the conquered have—or actually did have, at least in the Greek case—very different origins, language, and way of life to begin with. It even provides a historical origin for the "cosmopolitan" hankering and delight "in the foreign and the exotic," without which, even according

[83] Drews 1988 158-95

to Strauss, the relativity of custom from tribe to tribe, the relative and hence limited character of *nomos,* does not even begin to dawn on the human mind. Without this precise type of aristocracy as a social precondition, an extreme parochialism reigns, and there is no looking and no ability to look beyond the boundaries of one people's *nomos* to begin with.

Drews' account here and in the rest of his book is especially interesting in the way it provides a new and fresh means of considering Homer's already famous exposition of aristocratic morality. Drews' explanations of the myth of the "return of the sons of Heracles" and of the Catalog of Ships from the *Iliad* are especially relevant to my thesis here, namely as concerns the *unsettled,* wild, and "alien" origins of aristocratic morality even much later in the historical Greek world. The mainstream or textbook historical account of Greek history that now enjoys prominence both among scholars and the public begins with Mycenean palace bureaucracy, followed by collapse and the (still-unexplained) Dorian invasions, followed by a Dark Ages dominated by petty kinglets or *basileis,* then the rule of aristocracies and oligarchies, the rise of the *polis,* the transition in some cases to democratic rule, and so on. This appears then as the story of the successive transitions of a native people from order to collapse to the reestablishment of order, and it therefore gives the impression that settled life was the primordial norm to which later Greeks looked back longingly; and in particular the common impression is that the Greek aristocracy of Homer's own time and later, of the Archaic Age and the later Classical Age, was, both in its social existence and morality, a rather *late* development—a development "by chance" out of the social, economic and political

upheavals of the Dark Ages that followed the collapse of settled Mycenean civilization.

The model here presented, to the contrary, argues and brings considerable evidence to establish that the "primordial norm" to which the later Greek aristocracy looked back was one of wild, heroic, *unsettled* life; that the origins of the aristocratic ethos of the Classical Age can be found at the very *beginning* of Greek history,[84] and Homer's tale, the story of the Trojan War, which was so *constitutive* of the Greek aristocratic mind indeed throughout the history of that entire civilization, is not really the story of the Mycenean palace kingdoms at all.

Rather the oldest memory that the Greeks seem to have, at least as regards life in their new homeland, harks back not to the civilized Near-Eastern-type palace bureaucracies like Mycenae, Pylos, etc., not to speak of Knossos, but to the plains of Thessaly—a "wild" and lawless location if there ever was one in the ancient Greek mind. Thessaly, the home of Mt. Olympus, appears prominently in Greek mythology, and Drews offers an interesting explanation for this fact. Basing his claims on archaeological and linguistic evidence, and evidence drawn from poetry and from Homer himself, Drews argues that the Thessalian plain is the "point of arrival," where the intruders he described above first made their incursion. It was at the time (around 1600 BC) thickly settled, and richly productive agriculturally, but inhabited by a native population having, as he mentions, no apparent political organization or military tradition, and therefore easily exploitable. From their Thessalian "base," the

[84] And is therefore not a product of socioeconomic pressures following the collapse of Mycenean civilization around 1200-1100 BC; Drews dates the beginning of Greek history back to 1600 BC, and it is this primordial "alien" origin of the Greek aristocratic mind that is here emphasized.

invaders, soon to become the Proto-Greeks, proceeded to take over the southern plains and coastal sites along the Peloponnese. Here in the southern areas they established palace elite regime-types, on the Near Eastern Bronze Age model, but in the Thessalian "homeland" the bulk of the invading population remained, and a more primitive tribal way of life endured. The Homeric sagas, and in particular the sack of Troy, is not the story of the palace-based princes of Mycenae or Pylos, but rather an early Iron Age raid carried out by barons from Thessaly—perhaps consisting of no more than fifty ships—and not by the now-ossified palace bureaucratic elite of the Mycenean world. Indeed, it has been remarked by others how incongruous Homer's depiction of the aristocratic-piratical way of life is with what we now know of Mycenean life.

> Thessaly [is] something of a Hellenic cradle [in Greek mythology]. Here the original Hellas was located, and it was here that Prometheus begat Deucalion, Deucalion begat Hellen, and Hellen begat Aeolus, Dorus, and Xuthus...a great many myths have Thessalian connections, and some must have originated in Thessaly (for example the Titanomachy, the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs, the expedition of the Argonauts). It is from Thessaly that many of the heroic genealogies proceed, and, of course, it was Thessaly's Mt. Olympus that the Greeks regarded as the home of the gods....There is then some reason to believe that the great Thessalian plain (far and away the largest plain in all of Greece) was the initial destination of the PIE speakers who came to the Greek mainland, and that from Thessaly the PIE speakers went on to subjugate the plains further to the south...If Thessaly was the original "home of the heroes," we would expect to find that during the Mycenean Age there was a greater concentration of Greek speakers in Thessaly than elsewhere. Unusually good evidence to that effect comes from what is widely regarded as the earliest extant piece of Greek literature: the Catalog of the Ships, in the second book of the *Iliad*. In the catalog, which seems to have been composed when the geography of Mycenean Greece was still a living memory, almost one-quarter of the Achaeans' ships...come from Thessaly...We may say with some confidence that early in the Dark Age the Greeks recalled that during the Age of the Heroes, more warriors had lived in Thessaly than anywhere else...[85]

Thus what is preserved in Homer, and admired by his aristocratic audience both in the Archaic age and later, does not reflect a nostalgia for the settled cities and palaces of the Mycenean world, but for the more primitive, "feral" way of life preserved in the Greek "homeland" (or actually initial point of arrival and conquest)

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[85] Drews 1988 212-25

in the heroic wilds of Thessaly. Indeed, later migrations and disturbances within the Greek world, and especially the Dark Ages, can be explained by the repeated raids carried out by this original population, overthrowing their now-settled "cousins" in the Mycenean palaces and revitalizing thereby, as it were, the original "wild" or "barbaric" (to use a very inappropriate word) piratical ways of this people. *So far from being understood as a series of repeated attempts to reestablish order and settled life, Greek history, especially Greek aristocratic history, should rather be understood as a series of raids and incursions that seek reestablish the opposite. The original "antinomian" aristocratic orientation is repeatedly revitalized.*

The myth of the "return of the sons of Heracles" in the Peloponnese is then to be understood after this fashion. The proto-Greek tribes from Thessaly, who had maintained a more primitive "aristocratic" war-band based form of social organization, invaded the Peloponnese anew after they destroyed the Mycenean palace regimes, marking the beginning of "Dorian" rule:

> ...the evidence would support a thesis that the Dorians "took over" a population whose first language was something other than Greek, and whose ancestors had been at the lower levels of Mycenean society. The legend of the Return of the Heraclidae may therefore have a basis in fact. As a charter myth, it bestowed legitimacy on those who told it: the Dorians are the descendants of Heracles, whose sons were wrongfully expelled from the Peloponnese. This legitimizing element in the legend is as fictitious as Heracles himself. However, the story that the newcomers in three divisions established three regimes in the Peloponnese—one in Laconia, one in Messenia, and one in the Argolid—can not be explained as a charter myth. The Dorians did establish themselves in these places, they did so by force (there is, as we have seen, no persuasive alternative), and they may have come to all three regions at about the same time. As has recently been pointed out, the legend of the return does not depict the Dorians as destroyers, nor as founders of a new way of life, but as conquerors (who, for example, merely displaced the ruling house in Messenia and coexisted with the rest of the Messenian population). If we imagine small companies of Dorians taking over the most profitable parts of the Peloponnese, we shall have no difficulty at all in explaining why other small companies went as far as Crete and even Rhodes: they went not in search of land that they themselves could cultivate, but in hopes of taking over an agricultural population inured to service.[86]

[86] Drews 1988 203-26

Based on some interesting linguistic evidence, Drews attempts to prove that the majority of the Spartans' subjects did not even speak Greek perhaps as late as into historical times.[87] Indeed, the persistence of certain forms of sociopolitical organization, cultural practices and attitudes, and, most of all, myths from this early period well into the Greek Archaic period and after is remarkable, and especially relevant to my claims. Sparta was a "fossil," preserving very early customs and regime form; and is therefore especially valuable in understanding what is fundamental or original to the Greek aristocratic orientation.[88] The importance of Sparta and other Dorian-type regimes for the aristocratic Greek value system, and particularly in the work of Plato and Xenophon, is a commonplace in the literature. But what it appeared to have consisted in, yet again, is the imposition *and preservation* of a "wild," war-band based, martially regimented but, most of all, *unsettled* way of life on top of a servile, provinicial, settled way of life. The latter is only prized insofar as it gives greater freedom and intensity of expression to the former.

*Nomos* as universally exists among primitive cultures is already, from the beginning of Greek history, understood only as valuable insofar as it provides service for a higher and external principle. The *polis*—what Nietzsche calls "the aristocratic commonwealth" of breeding—is unique because of how it was able to accommodate and elevate what has been in this chapter called the "aristocratic" or "pastoral" way of life within the bounds of static, settled life; it represents a

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[87] ibid

[88] See also below Chapter 4, Nietzsche "On the Greek State" regarding Sparta as the original form of the Greek *polis*.

compromise between a "lower" and a "higher" that are of alien origin to each other. But in this compromise or fusion it is decidedly the "aristocratic" element that is determinative and constitutive of the new order. And it is this element *of absolute unmooring from the settled, democratic rule of the ancestral customs* that, when the actual aristocracies are in political and social decline in the late Archaic age, is radicalized, recovered, refined, and made abstract, not only by the philosophical way of life and its discovery of nature, but by the way of life of the tyrant.

*Appendix on Nature and Animal Similies in Homer*

In the following chapters of this thesis we will turn from speculations as to the prehistory or remote origin of Greek aristocracy and look at the texts—in particular those of Pindar and Plato—where, e.g., a poet who has been called the voice of the Greek aristocracy explains the elements of aristocratic virtue in his own words and from where we can learn, in a very direct fashion, about the origin of the idea of *nature* (and therefore *the* precondition for philosophy) precisely in this aristocratic teaching of virtue or in aristocratic life and morality.

This first chapter has been necessary, however, in order to attempt to understand, even if perhaps in a very rudimentary way, the most primitive conditions or elements out of which even a poetic and unphilosophical intimation of nature could come about in the first place. For, again, it is by no means clear how, given the accounts of Strauss or Rousseau regarding the condition of early prephilosophical man, there is even the possibility for even thinking of something like nature. *Nomos* is by far too powerful, and too ubiquitous at this stage of civilization, if it can be called civilization. Furthermore there is no account of why it

should have been precisely the Greeks who came up with the idea of nature, which is otherwise, even according to Strauss, unknown in any other historical civilization or culture, save those that have come into contact with Greek learning; Oriental despotisms also had city life and arts, but no word for nature and no concept of nature.

It has been argued in this chapter that such an understanding possibly first came about as a result of the peculiar way of life of an aristocracy of *pastoral* origin that has installed itself on a quite different farming population, which is thereafter reduced to the status of serf or banausic. That, out of the primitive attitudes of this aristocracy toward the primeval *nomos,* out of their experiences and way of life, out of their peculiar institutions—such as the warband of youths—and in particular out of their long experience with livestock and the breeding of horses and dogs for hunting, that the idea of nature could have developed out of these "primitive" sources, even if in a very basic and rudimentary form. Before we look at the first serious elaboration of the idea of nature, which is in Pindar, let us first consider briefly the appearance of nature in Homer.

The way in which this principle of individual distinction and superiority is manifested in Homer is in one's standing out among, and therefore leading, many armed men: and in turn this is done by exhibition of battlefield prowess, and of good counsel in assembly. These two primal Homeric virtues—*andreia* and *phronesis*—are, as we will see, later refined and abstracted, but not lost, in Plato and Pindar. But the fundamental principle of *breeding* as the foundation for this personal distinction—the *low* valuation, that is, of the idea that true virtue can be *taught* and

therefore the low valuation of *nomos* as mere instruction, leveling, or indoctrination—is what must be emphasized, even in Homer. Therefore the discussion of magnificence and superiority in Homer is often presented with direct analogy to animal life and with similes depicting animal powers.

The character of the Homeric kings is peculiar. It is clear that we are dealing technically with a case of *sacral* kingship, at least technically speaking (kingship as bestowed by divine favor): this is obvious not only from the divine ancestry of many of the Homeric heroes but also from the various Homeric titles used for them, one of the most direct being *Diotrephes,* "fed, nourished, fostered by Zeus."[89] And yet it is also clear we are dealing here with kings who are not derived from magicians or manipulators of superstition as per Frazer's model, but with kings whose power is derived from their military might. Thus at one point Achilles is enjoined to obey Agamemnon because, although he is clearly the stronger man (*karteros*), Agamemnon is superior because he leads more warriors—he is *pherteros.*[90]

It is telling that in aristocratic Greek language and in the language of Homer there are quite a few ways to express the fact that one man is better than another. But none of these comparatives—*karteros, iskhuroteros, pherteros, ameinon, beltion,* and especially not the *agathos aner* or *esthlos* that aristocrats even at the time of Pindar used for themselves—none of these refers to virtues of piety or ability to tell divine laws, or ability to foretell oracles, and the like. Manipulation of magic, prayers to the gods, religious activity, etc., is not prized in this fashion; the shaman is not an

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[89] Homer *Iliad* 2.445, among many instances

[90] Homer *Iliad* 1.175, then Agamemnon contemptuously tells Achilles to go back home and lord it over his Myrmidons (not great in number as Agamemnon's army)

impressive specimen and not in the running for rank. And so, although the seer Kalkhas is a man of great repute among the Akhaian host, and consulted on the most important divine matters, Agamemnon dismisses him (and also the local priest of Apollo) in the most contemptuous way, without any fear of incurring punishment from anyone.[91] These are kings who, though they indeed receive title to rule in a circuitous way by reference to "ancestry"—they have, after all, divine pedigrees—nevertheless receive the most legitimacy and honor from objective and *manifest* qualities or virtues: chief among these being, the possession of a large war band, personal courage in battle, and ability to give good counsel in the assembly of armed men. It is not that birth is not important; it might be that one's lineage comes into question, however, if one does not exhibit such qualities. It is the spurned ire of one of these Conans, not of an aggrieved priest or magician, that drives the plot of the *Iliad.* And Achilles, though born of a goddess, does not hold the greatest authority among the Akhaians by convention—it is the mortal Agamemnon who arguably does—but proves to be the best instead because of his innate excellences or *aretai.*

Indeed, it has been speculated that the initial quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon is a quarrel between nature and convention in *embryo,* so to speak. Agamemnon holds the royal scepter, indicating conventional and ancestral title to rule; but in challenging him Achilles, recognized by all to be the stronger and more excellent hero, swears an oath on a *scepter of nature,* a *sprouting* tree branch—this is incidentally the second and only instance of a word with the same root as *phusis*

[91] Homer *Iliad* 1.105

in the whole of Homer.[92] Clearly even here, before the elaboration of the standard of nature by philosophers, we have at least in its infancy a principle antagonistic to the primitive "democracy" that expressed itself in the "totality of *nomos,*" rule by the ancestral, rule by divine law, etc., as described by Strauss, Rousseau, Frazer, and others above. Kingship here, that is, the just or right kingship, depends as much on proven and manifest martial and even intellectual prowess as on ancestral traditions and pedigrees; indeed these are perceived as inseperable, and what binds them, we will see, is precisely *nature,* that is, heredity, blood.

In this connection, consider only the series of similes that precedes the famous Catalog of Ships.[93] The entire passage is riveting: it begins when, a meal ending, Nestor, the eldest of the kings, enjoins Agamemnon to delay no longer, but to call the heralds to gather together the army, and for the kings to go through the camp themselves and "awaken sharp Ares." The Zeus-nurtured kings gather around Agamemnon, speeding swiftly on their chariots through the camp and among them appears white-eyed Athena, bearing the aegis, encouraging the Akhaians: she awakens strength in the heart of each man to make war and fight, "and to these war became sweeter than to sail back in their hollow ships to the land of their fathers." Heroic warrior kings together with their patron goddess make the men forget the ancestral in favor of the excitement of battle abroad and the prospect of future glory. At this point Homer begins his similes that describe the transformed host of men.

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[92] The other being where Hermes shows the secret *phusis* of a plant in the wilderness to Odysseus. This is the reading of Seth Benardete, see first of all "Achilles and the Iliad" *Hermes* 91. Bd., H. 1 (1963), p. 15

[93] The following is based on Homer *Iliad* 2.445-85

The first simile compares the gleam of the army's bronze to the shining of a fire consuming forests on top of mountain. The second simile refers to the broad movements of the host: they are compared to *tribes [ethnea] of geese* that fly backwards and forwards and then settle with a thunder on some Asian meadow; in just such a way the many *tribes* (same word) flowed from the ships to the Skamandrian plain, and made the earth thunder with their feet and the hooves of the horses. Another two-line simile follows comparing now *their number* (rather than their motion) to the number of leaves and flowers in their season (of spring). The fourth simile compares *the shape* of the squadrons to the many *tribes* (same word, *ethnea*) of close-packed flies that gather in season of spring around the milk in the shepherd's station: in just such a way do the Akhaian *tribes* (again, same word) gather in the field eager to shatter the Trojans.

One is reminded here of Strauss' first words about the idea of convention or way, in which the word *nomos* is used interchangeably for the characteristic behavior of animal species and also for the characteristic customs of human tribes. As becomes rather vivid in these similes, however, it should be clear that the analogy between human and animal "tribes," went, for the prephilosophic mind *at least in this case*, quite a ways beyond a merely conceptual and abstract similarity. The behavior of human tribes is understood in Homer in much the same way as the behavior of animal packs, flocks, etc., not only in the sense that each has a certain characteristic behavior of its own that may be called with the same word "way," but also, and maybe more significant, in the sense that the human tribe is understood to have the same natural existence and cohesion as the animal one: both are

understood as "natural" and organic groups. The human tribe and hierarchy is as fitting as the hive and the hierarchy in the hive. Even more so, in transformed states, men are understood to directly "inhabit" animal powers and strengths. If there should be a doubt about this consider only the fifth and final simile in the series:

> And even as goatherds separate easily the wide-scattered flocks of goats, when they mingle in the pasture, so did their leaders marshal them on this side and on that to enter into the battle, and among them lord Agamemnon, his eyes and head like unto Zeus that hurleth the thunderbolt, his waist like unto Ares, and his breast unto Poseidon. Even as a bull among the herd stands forth far the chiefest over all, for that he is pre-eminent among the gathering kine, even such did Zeus make Agamemnon on that day, pre-eminent among many, and chiefest amid warriors.[94]

Human hierarchy, graced and intensified by the god, becomes as *manifest* as the hierarchy of a chief bull in a herd of cattle. It is again by observation of the animal world, and perhaps even through the long practice of breeding livestock, that *an alternative principle of hierarchy* coupled with *an alternative principle of ancestry*—observed descent of concrete physical qualities by blood and breeding as opposed to the authority of ancestral stories and laws—could have developed. This is not the only place where Homeric heroes are compared to animals: it suffices to bring up the recurrent similes comparing them to lions on the hunt or being hunted, for example Diomedes at the beginning of Book V when he is experiencing his *aristeia,* or moment of highest glory.[95] Such similes seem to occur when a statement

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[94] Homer *Iliad* 2.474-83

[95] The passage emphasizes both Diomedes' descent—his inborn fury is the same as his father's—and compares him to a wounded lion; Athena reminds him of his father and, as in the case of Agamemnon above, intensifies his animal spirit and through this intensification makes him resplendent, *manifest* (*ekdelos* at *Iliad* 5.2) among all the host so that he may win himself a true fame [*kleos esthlon*] [5.3]

> "Be of good courage now, Diomedes, to fight against the Trojans, for in thy breast have I put the might of thy father, the dauntless might, such as the horseman Tydeus, wielder of the shield, was wont to have. And the mist moreover have I taken from thine eyes that afore was upon them, to the end that thou mayest well discern both god and man. Wherefore now if any god come hither to make trial of thee, do not thou in any wise fight face to face with any other immortal gods, save only if Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, shall enter the battle, her do thou smite with a thrust of the sharp bronze." When she had thus spoken, the goddess, flashing-eyed Athene, departed, and the son of Tydeus returned again and mingled with the foremost fighters; and though afore his heart had been eager to do battle with the Trojans, now verily did fury thrice so great lay hold upon him, even as

is made on the opposition of the one superior individual to the inferior many, or when a statement is made regarding hierarchy of men in terms of natural excellences, or when a statement is made regarding the opposition of tribes to each other.[96]

The conclusion one can provisionally draw from this is that nature, as a standard different from and ultimately antagonistic to the "fundamental democracy" of "rule by the ancestral," seems to *erupt* into consciousness or to manifest itself first of all as *animal power* and as *animal hierarchy.* And it is with reference to this and similar phenomena that early aristocracy understands itself and justifies itself. We now therefore consider the full elaboration of this concept of nature—the prerequisite both of the philosophical and the tyrannical life—in Pindar's poetry

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upon a lion that a shepherd in the field, guarding his fleecy sheep, hath wounded as he leapt over the wall of the sheep-fold, but hath not vanquished; his might hath he roused, but thereafter maketh no more defence, but slinketh amid the farm buildings, and the flock all unprotected is driven in rout, and the sheep are strewn in heaps, each hard by each, but the lion in his fury leapeth forth from the high fold; even in such fury did mighty Diomedes mingle with the Trojans. [*Iliad* 5.125-45]

[96] See also Jonathan Gottschall, "Homer's Human Animal: Ritual Combat in the Iliad," *Philosophy and Literature* 25.2 (2001) 278-294 and his subsequent book; this is an attempt at reading Darwinian motivations into the "violence" of the *Iliad.* This is not a place for a review, but Gottschall's account, though somewhat useful in applying sociobiological insights to these texts is limited by his psychologism and by a simplistic Darwinian emphasis on competition for opportunities at reproduction. Benardete's account—that the problem of the girl war-prize Briseis is just a pretext that Achilles uses to prove his own virtue—is more believable given the fact that Achilles chooses, in the end, a glorious death over a comfortable domestic life.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE IDEA OF NATURE IN PINDAR

*In rams and asses and horses, Cyrnus, we seek the thoroughbred, and a man is concerned therein to get him offspring of good stock; yet in marriage a noble man thinketh not twice of wedding the bad daughter of a bad sire if the father give him many possessions, nor doth a woman disdain the bed of a bad man if he be wealthy, but is fain rather to be rich than to be good. For 'tis possessions they prize; and a noble man weddeth of bad stock and a bad man of noble; race is confounded of riches. In like manner, son of Polypaus, marvel thou not that the race of thy townsmen is made obscure;[1] 'tis because the noble are mixed with the bad.*
Theognis 183-92

*"Under all laws the straight-spoken man excels, whether by the side of a tyranny, or whenever the furious mob, or when the wise watch over the city."*
*"I bring the teaching of Cheiron."*
Pindar

*I. Introduction: Pindar's Place in a Brief History of "Nature":—*

Pindar (~522-443 BC), a Greek lyric poet from the city of Thebes, is not often considered as a political thinker. Of his considerable opus of dithyrambs, hymns, paeans, only the four books of *epinikia,* or victory odes, have survived in full. These odes are composed on the occasion of athletic victories at four athletic competitions—the Olympic, Nemean, Pythian, or Isthmian games—and were commissioned by the victor or by his family. Accordingly the odes—some quite short, some in the range of a few hundred lines—necessarily reflect the tastes, interests, and sensibilities of Pindar's aristocratic patrons and of the aristocratic audience, since these works were composed in order to be performed in public. Among Pindar's patrons were the Sicilian tyrants Hiero and Theron, who, however, made a considerable effort to conform to aristocratic *mores* and cannot be considered tyrants of the demotic type. Both Pindar and Theognis are the source of

[1] The word is *maurousthai,* see below on discussion of meaning of *maurosai,* to be made obscure or blotted out, in Pindar.

much of Nietzsche's understanding of Archaic Greece, and by him were called the voice or even the "mouthpiece" of the Greek nobility.[2] The work of Pindar is then an indispensible source for trying to understand ancient Greek aristocracy in the way it understood itself, and indeed for understanding the general features of aristocratic regimes as such.[3]

A restatement of the main argument in this thesis on political philosophy would at this point be useful, as the following chapter for the most part treats one author—Pindar—whose writings are not recognizably either directly political or philosophical. Nevertheless, his contribution to the development of the idea of *nature,* or *phusis,* is such that a treatment of his work is indispensible to understanding the fundamental connection that I claim exists between tyranny and philosophy. This connection was understood somehow intuitively by the people, by the city, and therefore explains so much of the initial and thereafter sporadic hostility toward the philosopher as a type, the general suspicion of philosophy as a way of life, especially on the part of democracies. Much of this thesis is devoted to proving that this intuition and suspicion on the part of the people was justified.

Philosophy and tyranny both appear as the characteristic forms of *decay of an aristocratic republic.* And so, to restate the thesis in a brief historical form, the default condition of a primitive tribe, if not all primitive tribes, might be called a "fundamental democracy" characterized by the ubiquity of ancestral law, or *nomos.* In the previous chapters I have tried to demonstrate that an ascending aristocracy

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[2] GM I.5 "...the Greek nobility, whose mouthpiece is the Megarian poet Theognis..."

[3] The work of Pindar rather than of Theognis will here be the focus, mostly because only fragments survive from Theognis and it is notoriously difficult to "fit" these together.

establishes itself almost exclusively from the outside, by foreign conquest, on top of a sedentary population, and usually is established by a pastoralist warrior elite that continues to rule, at least in the beginning, as a separate tribal group. A principle of *nature, phusis,* emerges from the exigencies of the way of life of the conquering elite. Though mentioned only twice in Homer, the principle of nature acknowledges for the first time a reality that exists outside human law, tradition, and convention—outside and in opposition to *nomos*—and which is somehow associated with biological observations regarding breeding or blood—in the case of Homer both references are botanical, to be precise. An aristocracy in decline, in danger, its members faced with imminent extinction of their liberty—if not of their lives—but, more pertinently, with the decline and decay of their traditions, severe laws, in sum, of their *regime* understood quite literally as a form of training, diet, gymnastic both of the body and spirit: this decline and danger produces the two closely related types, the philosopher and the tyrant. The means by which this happens is through a radicalization of the standard of nature, that is first undertaken as it were ideologically, in defense of aristocracy.

The decline in question is both internal and external. Externally, the aristocracy faces frequent challenges to its material power and, ideologically, to its claim to rule. These challenges are made in the name of the commons or of democracy but, as is almost always the case throughout history, it is not "the people" themselves who are acting as a political force—a *jacquerie* is not a revolution and is generally easily put down—but other disaffected aristocrats, intellectuals, merchants, and various elite factions who are claiming to represent the people. In

the period of decline of an aristocratic order such challenges become more frequent, and more frequently successful, the power of the aristocrats is diminished and sometimes erased in bloody revolutions, and, ideologically, the legitimacy and right to rule of the aristocrats is questioned or dismissed. In defense of the legitimate claims of aristocracy to rule appear poets, and later intellectuals, who invoke the idea of *nature.* It is most significant that in their defense of aristocracy these writers—in the case in question consider Pindar and Theognis—do not refer only to "tradition," to family genealogy, or to the divine provenance of existing laws and social forms. Rather, they share the argument that the aristocracy rules because it is physically, intellectually, and spiritually supreme, that such virtue or *arete* cannot be taught, and that it is a matter of *blood,* of birth and of nature.

There is something very "unstable" about this defense of aristocratic rule. If the standard for rule is virtue and ultimately *nature* (*phusis*) then what guarantee does one have that the traditional ruling classes of any particular city are really in congruence with the natural order of rank between man and man? This tension between nature and tradition, or *phusis* and *nomos,* is, as we have seen, unique to the Greeks, and may be said to have at least implicitly existed from a very early time in the Greek mind. Again, to bring up the crucial Homeric examples, did not Achilles, *aristos Akhaion,* the son of a goddess, the most beautiful of the Achaians and the best warrior, challenge that mediocrity Agamemnon, who was merely king by ancestral right and convention? Agamemnon, although recognized as having the supreme authority, has recourse to custom, to *nomos,* when he speaks holding the ancestral royal scepter. But Achilles swears an oath on a sprouting branch, on a scepter of

*nature:*[4] in fact, this is one of only two instances of the word *phusis* in all of Homer's opus.[5] The other instance, to remind the reader, is at *Odyssey* 10.303, when Hermes shows Odysseus the secret *phusis* of a healing plant. *Phusis* exists as a standard apart even from the divine, and outside the power of the divine; nature exists apart from both the divine and from convention and could be argued to be superior in power even to the divine. Agamemnon has recourse to *nomos* and to ancestral, i.e., divine right; but Achilles invokes the superior right of greater virtue and excellence, of *nature,* which is also inborn, but clearly different than genealogy as such.

Pindar and Theognis therefore are right, from their point of view, to attack the egalitarian pretensions of the *demos* and to defend aristocratic right with the argument from nature. But this argument, though justifying perhaps *some* aristocracy, is potentially in tension with the defense of existing hierarchies and traditions. There is then an entirely internal logic by which the "traditionalist" defense of aristocratic orders in the Greek world would or could lead to another and very different defense of aristocracy. In the following chapters, and in the work of Plato, we will see the means by which Pindar's defense of nature was radicalized and made abstract precisely in such a way—not only by sophists and various intellectuals, but by the Socratics themselves. It is this particular abstraction of nature that explains the ideological kinship, in some way even twinship, between early philosophy and tyranny.

There is a different way also in which *the decay of an aristocratic republic produces both the tyrant and the philosopher as related types*—this last phrase in

[4] See above chapter one, appendix
[5] In the verb *phuein,* to grow, *Iliad* 1.66

italics being a simplified but not inaccurate statement of this thesis as a whole. The decline is not only external but internal. The "internal decline" of an aristocracy will be more precisely defined and elaborated on later, particularly by Plato and by Nietzsche, but for now I offer a brief explanation, trusting in the generosity of the reader to accept language and words that, for the moment, will seem imprecise. *Arete,* virtue, excellence, is what undergirds an aristocracy's claim to rule, and excellence is defined first most concretely as prowess in battle and ability to give good political counsel, or to put it in Greek traditional language, *andreia* (manliness, bravery) and *phronesis* (prudence, practical wisdom). As we have seen in the previous chapter these two qualities are prized by a variety of warrior elites or aristocracies throughout the world and history, and are not unique to the Greek case. Two elements are required for *arête* to come about: nature or bloodline being the first, most important, and most indispensible; but second, also, training. It must not be forgotten that, although nature first appears as a principle "opposed" to convention or tradition, early aristocrats are not intellectualized philosophers, nor are they tyrants, but are themselves a historically concrete people or tribe, and therefore themselves live by their own tradition and *nomos.* Indeed, part of aristocracy's claim to rule is that its members are the most faithful preservers of ancient customs, genealogies, esoteric religious knowledge, and so on.[6] The point made regarding the rather "unstable" or paradoxical relationship between a traditional aristocracy and the standard of nature is not that aristocrats are secretly antinomian radicals who reject all historical traditions and appeal to nature or

[6] Nietzsche BGE 260: "art and enthusiasm in reverence and in devotion are the regular symptoms of an aristocratic way of thinking and valuing"

natural right—this is something that comes much later precisely with the decline and end of an actual aristocracy—but that aristocratic traditions and conventions point in a way to something above and outside the mere preservation of a tribal collectivity. That is to say, aristocratic traditions are distinguished from the traditions of the commons or of a primitive egalitarian tribe by the fact that these traditions consist of a *breeding* and *training* regime, to be understood in both cases quite literally. The purpose of this regime of breeding and training is the production of a specimen that biologically embodies *arête,* excellence, and possesses contempt for death as well as for mere life. Whereas, by contrast, the *nomos* of the subject population, and of all "default" populations whatsoever, is entirely directed to the preservation of mere life.

Nevertheless as regime, diet, training, aristocratic traditions must remain in large part the same as any other traditions in requiring of its members conformity, in requiring them to be *bound,* and in requiring discipline and obedience—perhaps the strictest discipline. For such an aristocracy must remain ever vigilant not only against outside threats, but also against the likely prospect that one of its own impressive and ambitious members doesn't grab power and end their liberties. When an aristocracy is in *internal,* as opposed to merely external, decline (the case indeed that is most interesting to us in the production of both the tyrant and the philosopher as types) these bonds and discipline are loosened. The immense energy, pressure, spiritual tension built up over generations is released, the conformity and regularity of republican *personae* is replaced by an effusive proliferation of

degenerate types,[7] both high and low, among who appear, finally, the tyrant and the philosopher as embodiments of biological *arête*—breeding for war and for reason—freed from all convention, all law, all binding, religion, and all piety. In the following chapters we will see how sophists, Socratics, and Plato himself, unbound the concept of nature in precisely this fashion and precisely for the purpose just stated, or, in other words, radicalized and made abstract the ultimate principle of the aristocracy while abandoning all actual, historical aristocratic orders and traditions. This chapter on Pindar, however, is an attempt to exhibit the stage just *before* the philosophical or sophistic revolution. This is an earlier stage in which appears the voice of an embattled but supremely confident aristocracy. The work of Pindar is indispensible for understanding the aristocracy's view of itself from the inside, or, as it were, for providing a phenomenology of aristocratic thought—here nature is not intellectualized or abstracted, but understood still in "the old way," organically connected with aristocratic traditions and beliefs about the divine. As unstable, and indeed ultimately as explosive, as this combination would later prove to be, in the work of Pindar these ideas still exist together as the foundation of aristocratic life and identity. It is accordingly exceedingly difficult for us moderns to understand the idea of nature in Pindar as he understood it, because the unity of tradition, the divine, and the natural seems so paradoxical. Nevertheless we must make the attempt.

[7] This is a paraphrase of the Nietzschean position that is elaborated below, see Chapter 4, section IIb

*II. Nature as the Body*

Pindar has long been recognized as "the voice of the early Greek aristocracy,"[8] and the following passage from Werner Jaeger's *Paideia* summarizes, as an introduction, a good way to appreciate the significance of his odes in celebration of athletic victories:

> When we turn from Theognis to Pindar, we leave the fierce struggles of the nobility...to defend its place in society, and mount to the calm, proud, inviolate life of early Greek aristocracy. At this height we can forget the problems and conflicts of Theognis' world [i.e., the aforementioned decline of the aristocracy and its defense], and be content to marvel at the power and beauty of that noble and distant ideal. Pindar shows us the Hellenic ideal of an aristocracy of race in the hour of its noblest transfiguration, when, after centuries of glory extending from the mythical past to the hard modernity of the fifth century, the nobility could still draw the gaze of all Greece upon its exploits at Olympia and Pytho, Nemea and the Corinthian Isthmus, and *could still transcend all regional and racial dissidences in the universal admiration of its triumphs.* It is this aspect of Greek aristocracy that we must study if we are to see the part that it played in the shaping of the Greek character was more than the jealous preservation of class-privilege and class-prejudice, and the cultivation of a relentlessly intensified code of ethics based on property. It was the true creator of the lofty ideal of humanity manifest to this day—though more often admired than understood—in the Greek sculptures of the archaic and classical periods. The athlete whom these works portray in the harmonious strength and nobility of this utmost perfection lives, feels, and speaks for us again in Pindar's poetry, and through his spiritual energy and religious gravity still affects us with the strange power which is given only to the unique and irrecoverable achievements of the human spirit. For it was a uniquely precious moment when the God-intoxicated but human world of Greece saw the height of divinity in the human body and soul raised to a perfection high above earthly powers, and when in those gods in human shape the effort of man to copy that divine model through which artists had realized the law of perfection, unattainable but imperious, found its purpose and its happiness.[9]

This is all very good, if a bit high-flown, and will be as far as this thesis will go in explicit so-called appreciation of Pindar. This should be interpreted, however, as a sign of respect or even awe for his writings, and an awareness of the inadequacy of any attempt to render the beauty of his poems to the reader in English. This is also

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[8] This is the title of Jaeger's chapter on Pindar, which is considered below.
[9] Jaeger 1939 V1. 205

because Pindar is for the most part untranslatable.[10] What follows will therefore be a pedestrian—and therefore distorted—and very literal account of only those elements in Pindar which are needed to render to the reader with some clarity the peculiar notion of *nature* as it is first elaborated. And in fact on this point Jaeger himself above refers to the particular significance of Pindar and Theognis' thoughts on later innovations in political thinking and political philosophy:

> The essentially aristocratic idea that a race must be preserved by inbreeding and special training [to be found in Pindar and Theognis] was worked out in Sparta above all, and also by the great educational theorists of the fourth century...it is enough meanwhile to say that both in Sparta and in the theories of Plato and Aristotle this ideal was extended beyond the limits of one class, and became part of the general Greek ideal that the city-state is the educator of all its citizens.[11]

While, for reasons that will become clear in subsequent chapters, this thesis does not completely agree with Jaeger on the last point he makes (the truth is rather the very opposite) the passage just quoted is itself an echo of the main argument here presented—to be found in developed form in the work of Nietzsche, who himself began as a scholar of Pindar and Theognis—the argument that later political philosophy, and maybe philosophy itself, is but a radicalization or abstraction of the same understanding of nature inherent in the Greek aristocratic way of life, and as expounded especially by Pindar. And hence the importance of understanding his

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[10] Camille Paglia's words on Pindar are quite apt:

> Pindar's ornate, visionary odes are untranslatable. Commissioned to praise athletic victors or memorialize gifts, they are, Schimdt says, "the extremity of art," moving "towards timelessness or abstraction." He calls them "a texture of cross-referencing" and "an almost continuous string of metaphors." The odes of Pindar's rival, Bacchylides, were lost until a smashed papyrus scroll of his work was discovered in Egypt in the 1890's and reassembled at the British Museum. After Pindar, Schmidt writes, lyric poetry lost vitality, and "verse thrived primarily in the drama." In the new Hellenistic world inaugurated by the conquests of Alexander the Great, "cultural authority" shifted from Athens to Alexandria in Egypt, where poetry now "lived in libraries'... [Paglia "'The First Poets': Starting With Orpheus" *The New York Times* August 28 2005]

[11] Jaeger 1939 204

thoughts on nature, leadership, and authority, however inadequately the attempt may here be made.[12]

Whereas the word for nature appears only two times in the whole of Homer's opus, it appears in Pindar's surviving poems approximately seventeen times by my count.[13] What this word means in Pindar is hard to figure out; it doesn't correspond directly to most modern understandings of "nature," and, given the fact that our own word is a term of distinction that comes exclusively from the Greek source (transmitted through Roman intermediary), in both its casual and philosophical uses, it may be fruitful to consider its precise meanings at the very beginning—an effort that has been made in the case of Homer, as we have seen above, but not as far as I'm aware, in Pindar's much more significant elaboration.

Pindar's own explicit uses of the word "nature"—*phusis*—and associated forms of the verb from which *phusis* itself is derived, namely the verb *phuein,* and the noun *phue,* (or *phua* in this Doric) seem at first sight to have multiple meanings, not directly related. The verb is usually translated in English as "to grow," while the

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[12] There has been, as far as I'm aware, no complete study of the idea of nature in Pindar. *All subsequent citations in this chapter are from Pindar's Odes, unless otherwise stated, and will be cited by book name, poem number, and, where appropriate, line number, e.g., Nemean 3.33 refers to the third Nemean ode, line 33. Line number will generally not be specified for longer passages in the citation, but within the quoted text in brackets.* The translation used for context is Svarlien 1990 as found on the Perseus Project, but considerable changes have been made by me in many cases.

[13] No significance should be attached to the otherwise significant number seventeen, for the simple reason that we don't have Pindar's complete works available to us today, but only a fraction have survived. Even so, the ubiquity of the word for "nature" in even the limited sample we have, which in its totality is considerably shorter than Homer's two epics where it appears only twice, should indicate the special importance of this strange concept for Pindar. If we are to consider the four books of victory odes as a self-enclosed whole, then the number seventeen may have some significance.

noun, *phue,* is translated as "growth" and also as "stature." These translations, however, are limited and somewhat misleading. Both *phusis* and *phue* in Pindar have a different meaning than the conventional translation—I will continue to render both as *nature,* with the warning that it is not yet clear what significance or meaning this term carries for Pindar. But there is one fundamental meaning we can be sure of. Nature, *phusis, phue,* refers first of all, and always, and above all, to a concrete material reality, to a biological reality that means very plainly: "the body." And this meaning should never, in all future refinements of the definition of nature, be forgotten or abstracted away from. All later attempts to further understand *phusis* in intellectualized or philosophical form, for example as "essence" and so on, or even as heredity or inborn character, may or may not be legitimate; but whatever *other* meaning this word will be shown to carry—and indeed it does carry further meaning—it always *also* means a concrete body, flesh and *blood,* a biological entity.

Now, first of all, Greek does have another word for body, with which the reader may be better acquainted, namely *soma.* And Pindar does use the word *soma* five times by my count. In all but one case, the reference is exclusively to the dead body, to corpses.[14] This is in keeping with the Homeric use of *soma.* When Pindar speaks of a body that is alive he uses the word *phue.* Thus, already in this distinction there is an important clue as to the full meaning of *phusis.*

[14] In the one case at Olympian 6.57 where *soma* is used for a live body, it refers to the foundling of the baby Iamus, son of Apollo and given the gift of prophecy, founder of a line of priests at Olympia. One can only speculate about why Pindar uses the word *soma* here for a living being; given that the line translates roughly as "For it had been hidden in the rushes and the boundless thicket his tender body washed in the golden and purple light of violets," it may be that Pindar thought the strength and vitality of *phue* was inappropriate to describe the fragility of a divine infant found among flowers.

In truth this hint was already dormant in Homer's limited use, although it would have been hard to draw the conclusion from a mere two examples; nevertheless, there is a botanical association in both Homeric usages of "nature." The branch on which Achilles lays his great oath is said to be *sprouting,* and is contrasted to the dead wooden scepter in Agamemnon's hands, which stands for the authority granted from mere convention. In Pindar as well, we see this same "bare" or old meaning of *phusis* in two of the seventeen examples: in one case where there is a reference to a statue "carved from a single piece of wood" [*monodropon phuton*][15]—the unusual choice of word here *may* be inspired by the fact that the object in question is a religious idol consecrated to a god housed in a rustic altar, and therefore vibrant with demonic energy. The other example where *nature* has an explicitly botanical meaning is introduced in a prophecy that the centaur Chiron gives to Apollo, wherein a queen and future bride of Apollo is said to be given the land of Libya, "not unblessed by trees bearing all kinds of fruit," [*oute pankarpon phuton nepoinon*] and not "unknowing of wild beasts."[16] The context of this latter reference, in which a god who is traditionally himself associated with prophecy and knowledge of the future nevertheless defers to Chiron the wild centaur for knowledge in particular of whether a breeding, in this case to a mortal woman, is lawful and will result in good issue for the land and for the people is especially significant, as we will shortly see.

The botanical associations of the meaning of nature or "body," are furthermore hinted at indirectly, in a third example that is especially beautiful. This

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[15] Pythian 5.42
[16] Pythian 9.58-9

is in the first Olympian Ode, written for Hieron tyrant of Syracuse in honor of his victory in the single horse race. In retelling the myth of Pelops, Pindar writes of the time "when he blossomed with the stature of fair youth, and down darkened his cheek"; in truth this is somewhat of a poetic translation because the original [*pros euanthemon d'hote phuan, lakhnan min melan geneion erephon*] does not include the words "of fair youth": the meaning is that Pelops' *phue,* or stature, or body, was blossoming or literally well-flowering, *euanthemon.* The time when a young man's beard first appears is taken to be the finest point of his beauty also elsewhere in Greek literature.[17] The context of this reference is again very significant, and it might be best to render here the whole passage about Pelops, again keeping in mind the inadequacy of any English translation:

> And when he blossomed with the stature of fair youth, and down darkened his cheek, he turned his thoughts to an available marriage, [70] to win glorious Hippodameia from her father, the lord of Pisa. He drew near to the gray sea, alone in the darkness, and called aloud on the deep-roaring god, skilled with the trident; and the god appeared to him, close at hand. [75] Pelops said to the god, "If the loving gifts of Cyprian Aphrodite result in any gratitude, Poseidon, then restrain the bronze spear of Oenomaus, and speed me in the swiftest chariot to Elis and bring me to victory. For he has killed thirteen [80] suitors, and postpones the marriage of his daughter. Great danger does not take hold of a coward. Since all men are compelled to die, why should anyone sit stewing an inglorious old age in the darkness, with no share of any fine deeds? As for me, on this contest [85] I will take my stand. May you grant a welcome achievement." So he spoke, and he did not touch on words that were unaccomplished. Honoring him, the god gave him a golden chariot, and horses with untiring wings. He overcame the might of Oenomaus, and took the girl as his bride. She bore six sons, leaders of the people eager for excellence. [90] Now he has a share in splendid blood-sacrifices, resting beside the ford of the Alpheus, where he has his attendant tomb beside the altar that is thronged with many visitors. The fame of Pelops shines from afar in the races of the Olympic festivals, [95] where there are contests for swiftness of foot, and the bold heights of toiling strength. A victor throughout the rest of his life enjoys honeyed calm, so far as contests can bestow it. But at any given time the glory of the present day [100] is the highest one that comes to every mortal man.[18]

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[17] Consider also Homer's reference in the context of *Iliad* 2.445-60 to the *phulla kai anthea gignetai en horei,* the generations of leaves and flowers that come about in season, which he compares in number to the tribes of Akhaians streaming out on the Skamandrian plain.

[18] Olympian 1

The matter in question, as in the example mentioned before regarding Apollo and Cheiron, is in this case one of finding a proper marriage the issue of which results in a race of heroes, leaders of the people, who are eager for fine deeds that win acclaim. The rest of the passage, referring to Pelops' desire to find such a marriage only as part of his search for danger and glory, in which utter contempt for mere life is expressed as a matter of course, is entirely in keeping with the fundamentally aristocratic meaning of *nature.* That is, this desire for glory comes upon him at the moment of the very blossoming and emergence of his *phue,* his body or his nature.

To summarize so far, first of all *phue* is meant as standing in contrast to the dead or passive corpse, *soma;* second, as having a particular affinity for "botanical" meanings, especially those having to do with bounty, with being all-fruitful, with energy; in the last example mentioned, Pindar makes the metaphorical connection between the botanical meaning and Pelops' body or *phue.* So far then, the meaning of nature is purely in reference to the physical body on one hand; yet, on the other, it is already a term of distinction, referring only to particular types of bodies, or bodies in a particular condition. There are already strong hints that the word carries more pregnant meaning. Let us for now note the remainder of the instances where Pindar uses *phue* to refer to the body as we understand it, or to purely immediate physical attributes.

In praise of a wrestling victor at the Isthmian games who has particular skill and ferocity but is slight of frame, Pindar says that

...in the toil of conflict he resembles the spirit of loud-roaring lions in boldness, while in wisdom he is like the fox, who forestalls the swoop of the eagle by falling on her back. And it is right to do anything to blot out [*maurosai* literally: darken/make dim] one's enemy. For Melissus was not allotted the nature of Orion; he is negligible to look at, though heavy to grapple with in his strength. And yet once there went from Thebes, Cadmus' city, a hero short in stature but unflinching in spirit...[19]

The description here refers to Melissus' body in particular, and in a particularly restricted sense. The meaning here appears entirely material, "physical," even just having to do with size, and entirely at the "surface" level. Melissus' *phusis* is contrasted to Orion's presumably much more impressive *phusis.* It is unclear if this *phusis* includes Melissus' great strength, his fighting spirit, or his animal characters of lion and fox—the context of Pindar's words at first sight would seem to imply that *phusis* does not contain these meanings; but let us hold off judgment for a moment. At the very least what we see is that *nature* (here actually in the full form as *phusis*) can refer almost exclusively to the body in the simple context of its frame and size. The meaning is fundamentally concrete and material. Still even so what is apparent is that even in this limited usage there is a note of *distinction,* or *intensity* in the meaning implied. It could be loosely translated as "Melissus does not have a *body as impressive and large* as Orion's." Pindar could have used the word "size," but he chose *phusis,* and the comparison made is to a mythical hunter of great skill; Melissus' stature or *phusis* is in question because it is *surprisingly small* for a victor of such strength and skill. Finally, let us note here for the moment another important clue, a concept which will come up again: in the context of discussing Melissus' special skills, strength, and *phusis* at the moment of his victory, i.e., at the very moment of Melissus' *phusis* emerging, and emerging into the light, Pindar says

[19] Isthmian 4

that it is right to do anything to *blot out,* or literally to darken, to dim [*maurosai*] one's enemy.

In another special emphasis on the purely material and concrete meaning of *phusis/phue,* Heracles, in a prayer to Zeus, asks that Telamon's son Aias have a nature or body as indestructible as the skin of the Nemean lion:

> And Heracles stretched his invincible hands up to heaven and said, "Father Zeus, if you have ever heard my prayers with a willing heart, now, now with divine prayers I entreat you to grant this man a brave son from Eriboea, a son fated to be my guest-friend. May he have a **body [phue] as invulnerable as this skin** that is now wrapped around me, from the beast whom I killed that day in Nemea as the very first of my labors. And may he have spirit to match. When he had spoken, the god sent to him the king of birds, a great eagle. He felt thrilled inside with sweet joy, and he spoke like a prophet: "Telamon, you will have the son that you ask for. Name him after the bird that appeared: wide-ruling Aias, awesome in the war-toils of the people.[20]

Thus *phue* here refers merely to the physical body; and the spirit—to be understood here not as a metaphysical soul, but as the fighting spirit or anger of a lion—*thumos,* is considered something quite apart. But again, although the word refers "merely" to body, it refers to the body in a particularly significant context: a prophecy regarding the issue of a child, with the surety of a deity, who will be as indestructible in body as the skin of the Nemean lion. This hide being an object of untamed power and energy that Heracles through his efforts subdued in struggle, making human civilization possible.[21] Thus even in the most casual references to "merely" material bodies or the properties of bodies, *phusis* and *phue* always appear endowed with religious gravity, with reference to great energy, skill, or strength, to

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[20] Isthmian 6

[21] For a reference from Pindar to Heracles' labors as having served just this function, see Nemean 3:

> Still, if the son of Aristophanes, who is beautiful, and whose deeds match his looks, [20] embarked on the highest achievements of manliness, it is not easy to cross the trackless sea beyond the pillars of Heracles, which that hero and god set up as famous witnesses to the furthest limits of seafaring. He subdued the monstrous beasts in the sea, and tracked to the very end the streams of the shallows, [25] where he reached the goal that sent him back home again, and he made the land known.

the fruitfulness or titanic powers of untamed nature, and in connection often with marriage and breeding.

Yet another significant reference to *phua* that fits just this pattern occurs in the great Pythian Ode 4 for Arkesilas, king of Cyrene, winner in the chariot races at the Pythian games, a poem I will have occasion to return to later. For now, the reference to *phua* in this poem is superficially entirely "material" and concrete, referring to the "strong sides" of a team of demonic oxen that Aeetes, father of Medea, has presented as a challenge for the Argonauts: if their captain is able to plough the land with these giant beasts, the golden fleece will be theirs. Jason sets his great strength against the "strong-sided *bulk*" (*epipleuroi phuai*) of these animals, yokes them, and achieves the great task, to the dismay of Aetees. In this case, as in the reference above to Melissus, *phua* seems to refer to mere size, bulk. But just as in that example the comparison of size, nature, body, *phua,* was to Orion, the great hunter, here it is used to refer to a team of demonic and magical beasts of great strength. Even more significant is how Jason is actually able to overcome this challenge. For prior to this feat, Pindar explains how

> Aphrodite of Cyprus brought the maddening bird to men for the first time, and she taught the son of Aeson skill in prayerful incantations, so that he could rob Medea of reverence for her parents, and a longing for Greece would lash her, her mind on fire, with the whip of Persuasion. [220] And she quickly revealed the means of performing the labors set by her father; and she mixed drugs with olive oil as a remedy for hard pains, and gave it to him to anoint himself. They agreed to be united with each other in sweet wedlock...[22]

Thus again, whenever *phua* or any version thereof is mentioned appears the same fateful connection to the arts of love, to wedlock, breeding, or intercourse. The connection to the example of Pelops above should be quite clear. In both cases a

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[22] Pythian 4

great hero embarks on an adventure of danger and death, showing contempt for mere life[23] and a desire to win a great renown on the occasion of the blooming of his own *phua.* Pelops calls upon the help of a god to win a glorious bride from a mad father who kills suitors as part of a ritualistic challenge. He wins the bride and the kingdom by his strength, one might say by using the lion. The foxy Jason calls on the help of another god, Aphrodite in this case, to seduce and trick Medea who will betray her father and show Jason the way to overcome her mad father's challenge: the reward is the fleece, Medea, and "everflowing renown" for a great deed throughout all time. In both cases a young adventurer bests an aboriginal king, marries or seduces his daughter, and wins great renown or founds a great line of leaders. Thus we are alerted in both cases to the special and full meaning of *phua,* body, nature. It is concrete, material, biological body; and it is much more. In both cases it seems to have to do with the emergence of a body in supreme condition into the enduring radiance of fame—of being—and with the perpetuation of a divine bloodline.

The following example better illustrates just what kind of "body" is meant by *phua* or *phusis,* and the relationship of such body indeed not just to blood, but to truth and to being itself. In celebration of a victor of the *pankration,* a kind of free-for-all mix of boxing and wrestling similar to modern mixed martial arts, Pindar praises the winner, from his own native Thebes, in the following terms; first, after briefly recounting some of the most notable moments of Thebes' glorious past, he says,

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[23] For the case of Jason and his warband, in which the contempt for death and desire for great glory is very emphatic, see the end of this chapter.

But since ancient grace sleeps, and **mortals are forgetful** of whatever does not reach the highest bloom of skillful song, joined to glorious streams of words, [20] then begin the victory procession with a sweet-singing hymn for Strepsiades; for he is the victor in the pancratium at the Isthmus, both awesome in his strength and handsome to look at; and he treats/holds excellence [areta] as not uglier/more shameful/inferior to body [phue]. **He is made radiant** by the violet-haired Muses, and he has given a share in his flowering garland to his uncle and namesake, [25] for whom Ares of the bronze shield mixed the cup of destiny; but honor is laid up as recompense for good men.[24]

The contrast here made is explicitly between virtue or excellence (*areta*) on one hand, and *phue* on the other; it should be mentioned that many traditional translations of the passage above have rendered *phue* as "beauty," as in "and he holds excellence as no worse a possession than beauty." A translation that in my view is not justifiable if one is trying to understand the particular and literal meaning of *nature* as Pindar himself understands it, and which lacks the frankness and strangeness of the original; but that in the context of this passage is nevertheless superficially defensible. The translator, in other words, has herself recognized that *phue* as Pindar uses it is always a term of distinction, and that while it indeed refers to a concrete material body or to a "stature" or a physique, it is always in the sense of its outstanding condition: in this case rendered as its "beauty." Yet, if we are to accept this conventional translation even temporarily, we must add that this is a beauty pregnant with violent power and energy, "beauty as power," something akin to Michelangelo's Moses. Strepsiades is said to be marvelous or terrible in his strength (*sthenos*)—the word used is striking: *ekpaglos,* a form of "outstanding" that carries connotations of physical violence and terrible power. [25] Strepsiades is said to be *idein morphaeis,* shapely to look at, well-formed,

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[24] Isthmian 7

[25] We will see shortly that the prefix *ek-* or "out" is especially significant in all discussion of nature in its original meaning. Recall Homer saying that Athena made Diomedes *ekdelos meta pasin* at the

with the same adjective used of sculpted statues. The reference to *phue* is entirely in this context, and "body" must be understood only in this context and this condition.

As for the strange phrase *agein t'aretan ouk aiskhion phuas,* the literal translation is, as I've rendered it above, "he considers/holds/believes excellence to be not uglier/more shameful than his body (*phue*)," that is to say, Strepsiades, endowed with such an awesome physique and violent power, holds the doing of great deeds (*areta) in* equal reverence as his own impressive nature or body. But the gentlemen—the *agathoi* for whom honor is laid up as recompense for great deeds in the last line quoted—will always hold reverence for their own *phua* and inner strength, or literally their bodies; one of their particular qualities is to be "in awe" and reverent before this, literally obedient to and heedful before its physical calling much like Pelops was on the blooming of his own *phua.* This obedience is expressed as their being ever ready to abandon safety and mere life for the danger of death and the winning of a great renown; but the point would seem to be that *phua* literally carries some compulsory or irresistible power that orients and propels them to deeds of *areta.* Recall how the ode above starts, with an enumeration of Thebes' great glories, of which people are forgetful. Mortals—*not* men, *andres*—but mortals, *anthropoi,* people, are forgetful of great deeds. They live in darkness, forgetting, for they themselves are dim and dark, ignorant, or envious. Their envy and ignorance covers up reality. They cover up reality under a stream of falsehoods and words. Real men, *andres,* have being, or have more being. They have

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beginning of *Iliad* 5 at his moment of *aristeia;* in part by kindling a great fire on his head and shoulders.

reverence for their being, or body, and listen to its vehement calling—they can't help but listen, or obey in this case. Bred *phua* is more real than other bodies, which are shrouded in darkness. These men are apparent and manifest in their great deeds; the watchful eye of the seer, the poet, picks these out and preserves the deeds in words to make them apparent, visible, through time, to make their fame or being endure. Strepsiades' *phua* or intensified reality is what makes him become "radiant" and emerge from a primeval and undifferentiated darkness. This is truth and reality, and this is nature. This may sound rather impressionistic or high-flown for now; but a further consideration of Pindar's use of the idea of *nature* will show that the meaning of this word is quite precise, and precisely quite strange and alien for moderns.

### *III. Nature and the Body as Blood and Heredity; Heredity as Truth*

Nature is body and blood and is therefore hereditary. Knowledge of breeding and heredity is, again, to be expected among a pastoral or originally pastoral people who have long experience with livestock breeds. Furthermore, when war and hunting are highly prized, there is also an emphasis on the breeding of horses and of dogs, which we know to have been of special interest to the Greek aristocracy.[26] In

[26] See, again, beginning of Xenophon's *On Hunting with Dogs,* in which Cheiron is mentioned at length as a teacher of heroes and as matchmaker for their parents. This is understood in connection to the art of breeding good lines of animals. Also consider his essay on horsemanship. See also above H.D. Rankin, "Plato's Eugenic *Euphemia* and *Apothesis* in *Republic* Book V" *Hermes* 93 4 1965, p 417, in which the tastes of Greek gentlemen are recounted: "The selective breeding of sporting and ornamental animals was one of the characteristic hobbies of an Athenian gentleman. Glaucon, Plato's brother, was an enthusiastic breeder of animals; Plato's step-father Pyrilampes was renowned for his

the athletic games the prize for the winning chariot team or in the contest of the single horse race was given to the patron—that is, the breeder of the horse—and not to the driver of the chariot or the jockey. It is most interesting that a 19th century British commentator on Pindar's odes mentions that the custom for horse races in England was exactly the same: the credit belonged to the owner and developer of the horse breed, a custom that, as far as I know, was developed independently in England and not inherited from the Greeks.[27]

The most comprehensive reference to nature in the context of heredity in Pindar concerns, however, not a comparison to livestock or animals, but, yet again, to the world of plants and crops. The fourth instance where Pindar compares *phusis* to the generational flowering of the trees, plants, and crops is in the sixth Nemean Ode and especially instructive:

There is one race of men, one race of gods; and from a single mother we both draw our breath. But all allotted power divides us: man is nothing, but for the gods the bronze sky endures as a secure home forever. Nevertheless, we bear some resemblance to the immortals, either in greatness [5] of mind or in nature, although we **do not know, by day or by night, towards what goal fortune has written that we should run. Even now Alcimidas gives a great sign to be seen that his inborn is like the fruitful fields, which, in alternation, [10] at one time give men yearly sustenance from the plains, and at another time gather strength from repose.** He has come from the lovely games of Nemea, the contest-contending boy who, pursuing this ordinance of Zeus, has shown that he is a

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peacocks. Once it is accepted that the analogy of animal breeding has a relevance to the procreation of mankind, it begins to seem paradoxical that human eugenics are so neglected..."

[27] Gilbert West *A Dissertation on the Olympic Games* as appears in vol. 2 of *The Odes of Pindar* Oxford 1824 pg. 124:

But after all it may seem impertinent to use many arguments with an English reader, to convince him of the wisdom and justice of a proceeding which is every day practiced amongst us; who have also our horse races, and prizes for the victor, established originally with the same view as those of which I am now speaking, and under some of the same regulations: particularly with regard to the bestowing the prize, which with us, as with the Grecians, is conferred upon the owner of the horse that wins the race, and not upon the rider...

See also the suggestion at p. 116-7 that the Olympic games were developed initially specifically to encourage the breeding of fine horses.

successful hunter in the wrestling ring, [15] by planting his step in the tracks of his grandfather, his blood-relative.[28]

Let us leave for a moment the explicit mention of *phusis* in the passage above—wherein men are said to resemble the gods in nature or in greatness of mind, for that is quite mysterious—and focus first on the question of heredity, here rendered literally as "the inborn," *to sungenes.* The view just expressed of the technicalities of heredity is quite sophisticated and entirely in keeping with modern knowledge of the inheritance of certain congenital qualities—whether diseases or advantages. That is, there is the question of regression to the mean on one hand, or of certain hereditary qualities "skipping a generation" on the other—in keeping with well-known Mendelian rules for trait inheritance. Children of very tall people, for example, will tend to regress to the mean of the population in question—Socrates' sons were nonentities. This mechanism explains how it may be that inborn excellence will exhibit itself in one generation of an aristocracy but not in another. Nature hides, lays dormant, occasionally manifests itself in explosive actions. Pindar repeats exactly this same idea at Nemean 11, even claiming to see evidence of cross-breeding; where, however, instead of the word *phusis* or *phua,* or inborn, he just directly uses the matter-of-fact "blood," *haima;* as clear an indication as any about what "nature" and the nature of a man or a being[29] means in Pindar:

Truly, it was easy to recognize in him the ancient blood of Peisander of Sparta, who came from Amyclae with Orestes, [35] leading here a bronze-armored host of Aetolians, **and also the blending of his blood** with that of his mother's ancestor Melanippus, beside the stream of the Ismenus. **But ancient excellence yields strength in alternate generations of men;**

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[28] Nemean 6

[29] It must be emphasized again that, as far as I know, *phusis, phua,* and all variations of the word for nature are exclusively used for living beings, whether plant, animal or human in Pindar. There is no question of using *phusis* for nonliving things.

**the dark fields do not give fruit continuously, [40] nor are trees accustomed to bear an equal wealth of fragrant flowers in every circling year, but in alternation.** And thus the race of mortal men is led by Fate. But no clear sign comes to mortals from Zeus. Nevertheless we embark on bold endeavors, [45] longing for many deeds, for our limbs are bound by shameless hope, while the streams of foresight lie far away. But we must hunt for due measure in our love of gain. The madness of unattainable desires is too sharp.[30]

At first sight this may also look like a preemptive apology on the part of someone making the argument for aristocracy. The justification for aristocracy being that "the best rule," the immediate and common objection is that the sons of aristocrats who may display great abilities or skill are often themselves average or below average. And that therefore there is no justification to aristocracy in reality. In any case, a counterargument to the democratic objection raised is that exemplary natural qualities will not exhibit themselves in every generation, but that blood is "like the fruitful fields, which, in alternation, [10] at one time give men yearly sustenance from the plains, and at another time gather strength from repose." If it is true in the case of crops, where fields need to lie fallow occasionally, it may also be true in the case of men.

Such an interpretation of Pindar's intentions in these two passages, however, is not only rather vulgar, but also likely wrong. These odes were not written for performance in front of the mob, of democratic parties, or of factions representing them, with the purpose to convince them of the rightness of aristocratic rule. These were meant for private exhibition for an aristocratic audience that didn't need

[30] Nemean 11. It is no accident that so many mentions of *phusis* in Pindar are paired with references to "foresight" or the rare ability to see "the things that will be"; see below, the conclusion of this chapter, regarding Pindar's beliefs on wisdom and the wise man.

"extra reasons" to believe in its own legitimacy.[31] Most of the individuals for whom Pindar wrote these odes lived in states—Thebes, Aegina, Syracuse, even Thessaly—that maintained a firm aristocratic or at least oligarchic form of government quite late.[32] These were not men who in any case felt the need to justify themselves, or, as we will see, "to come with five reasons ready" to justify their position—such an attitude was held to be in bad taste, and to be held under suspicion. One has *authority,* one *commands,* one doesn't need to give reasons; reasons, justifications, rationalizations—these are for plebeians and the envious.

Finally and most important, we see across the world a variety of elites and ruling classes that, if they ever did have to explain their position in society to themselves or to others, could refer simply, more easily, and exclusively to obeisance to ancestral law, to the divine as the ultimate source of ancestral law, to convention, to their status as the faithful carriers of custom or interpreters of the divine law, or even to their function as public servants who fulfill their public functions dutifully; to purely religious doctrines such as *karma,* and so on. No ruling class *needs* the concept of *phusis* or of the inborn to justify itself, or of the alteration of eruption of excellence in the different generations of a bloodline, and indeed the Greek aristocracy seems to have been unique in this regard. The notion of nature and heredity here presented should then be considered on its own terms, and not as

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[31] See Nietzsche TWI "The Problem of Socrates" on the ancient Greek aristocrat's contempt for self-justification, coming up with "five reasons ready," etc.

[32] The cases of Syracuse or Akragas, ruled by the tyrants Hieron and Theron respectively, to whom Pindar dedicates certain odes, are not exceptions, as we will have occasion later to see: these tyrants "made considerable effort" to conform to aristocratic expectations and norms and can't really be considered rabble-rousing "champions of the people" as in the Platonic denigration of tyranny.

an apologetic exercise. Heredity and nature here don't mean just genealogy or hereditary conventional right.

If we look more closely at the passage above then, we see the remarkable phrase "Alcimidas gives a great sign to be seen that his inborn" qualities are like the fruitful fields: for, although his father was not distinguished he is similar to his blood-relative, his grandfather (literally *homaimos,* same-blooded). His grandfather won at boxing at the games five times. And his grandfather himself in turn "put an end to the obscurity of Socleides,"—the phrase used is *epause lathan,* literally "put a stop to the forgetfulness"—that is, redeemed the memory of a previous and more remote ancestor whose exploits had been "dormant" in the intervening generations. What is inborn, nature, is said to give a "sign to be seen," or a visible mark. It is in overt action that nature is *revealed.* The word here used is *tekmar,* and it is of special significance: it refers to a concrete, manifest visible mark or sign, evidence that impresses itself directly on the perception in action or image, not something explained in *logos* or speech or logically deduced. This sense of nature becoming *apparent* or emerging into the light is reinforced when Alkimidas is later described as *enagonios,* which above I have rendered quite literally as "contest-contending" or "loving contests," but which also carries meanings of "*vivid,* apparent, energetic." The fact that this last word has the double meaning—both "one who loves the *agon,* the contest" and "something vivid, vehement, apparent, energetic"—is by itself quite revealing. Nature of man only manifests itself in great deeds and in victory in contests. The aristocracy's understanding of itself, and for itself, was entirely dependent on the flowering or manifestation of areta, of excellence, of power that

bests others in contest. It is the body, the blood in the totality of its struggles and victory: nature and heredity may lie fallow for a generation or two, but *if they exist,* they only manifest and prove themselves in great deeds that overwhelm the perceptive observer as an outward visible sign. Aside from this there is only convention, "tradition," empty speech, chatter.

The rather mysterious beginning of this ode then now begins to make more sense:

> But all allotted power divides us: man is nothing, but for the gods the bronze sky endures as a secure home forever. Nevertheless, we bear some resemblance to the immortals, either in greatness [5] of mind or in nature, although we do not know, by day or by night, towards what goal fortune has written that we should run. Even now Alcimidas...[33]

What justifies the change of topic here—from man's lack of knowledge of his own future and condition to Alkimidas' exhibition of the inborn qualities of his bloodline? Men are said to bear some resemblance to the gods in nature (*phusin*) or in greatness of mind (*megan noon*). The qualifier of "great" is not seen, here or elsewhere, as ever necessary to describe *phusis—phusis* is itself great by definition. By contrast, *noos* is not necessarily intellectual power but may be translated as intent, or intentionality, the mind as a "purpose." Thus in great striving or grand intent on one hand, and in nature or body on the other, men are in some sense like the immortals. To find out in what way (some) men are the same as the immortals, first ask, then, in what way are men different? Unlike the immortals who endure forever in the bronze sky, men live in obscurity and darkness, quite literally. Obscurity, forgetfulness and ignorance being two sides of the same coin: in

[33] Nemean 6

darkness, as in, ignorant of their fate, goal, and future; and in darkness also as in, forgotten, not known, not apparent or manifest, not having *being,* or more precisely, *intensity of being* and of body, not having *phusis.* Alkimidas *has phusis.* He has manifested it in victory; it became revealed, as in a sign, *tekmar,* visible proof. He has raised his bloodline once again from obscurity and forgetfulness and darkness and into the radiant light of renown, which is like the enduring bronze sky that is a surety for the endurance of the immortals. The implication here should be quite clear, the converse of all this should be clear: most people do not have *phusis. Phusis* is not a reference then merely to inborn character, specific orientation in the abstract, inclination and so on—though it is that as well: but crucially, because most alien to our understanding—there is a question here of *intensity.* Some beings *are* more than others; they have more being, more nature. *Phusis,* the truth or the knowledge of a being, is not "discovered" by deduction, but only manifests itself in action if the being in question should have *enough phusis.* The question here is not moral, or not necessarily *just* moral, but one having to do with the meaning of *nature* itself, of what nature or truth is. It is not just a question of beings having "different natures" or inclinations, but more fundamentally, of having "enough nature," enough intensity that the truth of the being may become differentiated from the fundamental and indistinct darkness.

Accordingly we see that the truth of what a man is may not be revealed until the end of his life, if that is when his victory only finally comes. Pindar says, of an older contestant, with grey hairs ironically "growing" [*phuontai*]

So, by trial, Erginos, the Argonaut, was saved from the reproach of the Lemnian women. Unsuccessful before, he won the race in armor, and said to Hypsipyle as he went after the crown: "This is what I am in swiftness. My hands and heart fully match my feet. The race is for the young, but I am younger than my seeming. Gray hairs grow often on young men before the time. The final trial is the test of mortals."

Psaumis had every virtue but success; now this is added. So Erginos was a man of might, of courage; now he has shown his speed.[34]

It has been said about this passage, "The final test is the true test. Success may be slow in coming, but when it comes it reveals the man."[35] This, again, should not be interpreted merely as a moral, let alone as a rhetorical, claim. The meaning should be taken quite literally: Psaumis, like Erginos, have finally shown who they are: *phue, phusis,* body only becomes apparent, real, only possesses *being,* and bloodline is only proven at the hour of its triumph in contest, during the exhibition of a great feat of excellence, of great physical strength, of victory in battle, of violent victory over an opponent, or over a challenge as in the case of Pelops or Jason. It is in this that truth, being, reality, are known, literally become apparent at all.

The default condition of nature then is that it lies concealed or dormant, especially in intervening generations, but that it explodes or erupts with irresistible power in the world and impresses itself on the observer with equal violence. In almost every case where Pindar refers to the hereditary and inborn property of nature, there is some reference also to a word indicating manifestation, revelation, the bringing out of something from the forgotten or concealed into the realm of the visible, and so on. At Pythian 8, Pindar relates a prophecy of "Amphiaraus the son of Oicles spoke[n] in riddling words, when he saw, in seven-gated [40] Thebes, those

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[34] Olympian 4

[35] Note to *Olympian* 4 by Basil L. Gildersleeve, *Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes* New York 1885

sons standing by their spears, when they came from Argos on that second march, the Epigoni. Thus he spoke, while they were fighting: 'By nature the genuine spirit of the fathers [45] is conspicuous in the sons...' " The Greek for the last phrase is *"phuai to gennaion epiprepei ek pateron paisi lema,"* and the crucial verb *epiprepei* could be translated roughly as "becomes conspicuous" but also "stands out upon," "is fitting upon." It is a verb used with similarly pregnant meaning when at *Odyssey* 24.252, Homer's Odysseus, meeting his father Laertes who is working as a gardener, remarks that, although unkempt, uncared for, poor, malnourished, the old man "does not stand conspicuous to the sight as in any way a slave in form or greatness" [*oude ti toi douleion epiprepei eisorasthai eidos kai megethos*] but rather has the true bearing of a king. He recognizes his father's nature—it is revealed to the eye despite all outward and conventional signs to the contrary—just like Amphiaraus the prophet sees the "genuine spirit" [*gennaion lema*] of the fathers *stand out* in the sons "by nature," or literally, "by body," by stature and bearing [*phuai*]. One might also add, in the case of *Odyssey*, the parallel episode, both comic and powerful, and relevant to our case, when Odysseus is shipwrecked on the island Phaeakia. He has been stripped of literally everything, including his clothes. The princess Nausicaa is on the beach with her consorts engaged in the age-old renewal and purification ritual of washing and airing out clothes. Odysseus boldly approaches her completely naked; the servants are frightened and run, but he manages, naked and stripped of every outward mark of power and wealth, to reconstruct his kingly status through the power of aristocratic speech and of his bearing.[36] The true measure of the man,

[36] I am indebted to Camille Paglia for the reading of this episode.

his nature, is in all these cases revealed: heredity and blood become apparent in body. Reduced to mere body, to utter destitution, a shipwreck, or, in the case of his father Laertes, to an unkempt tiller of the soil, the blood of a king, and the fact of heredity—the *phusis,* nature, the truth about a being—reveals itself precisely in this reduction to bare biology.

## *IV.* Phusis *as Heredity is Opposed to* Nomos

Body, blood, biology differs from man to man so p*husis* differs from man to man, both in the vehemence of its manifestation, and in the particular inclinations and character produced. Thus for example it is said,

> Each of us differs in nature,[*phuai d'hekastos diapheromen*] for we were each allotted a different life. [*biotan*] [55] One man has this, others have something else; but for one man to win the prize of complete happiness is impossible.[37]

In this the concept of *phusis* explains human variety in an alternative way to that of *nomos* or convention—*nomos* may perhaps (but only maybe) explain the difference between tribal behavior, let us say, the wedding ceremonies of one tribe as opposed to another. It may also arguably explain the different function and behavior of different men within a tribe, which it has led, either by command or by instruction, to different occupations or arts. The standard of nature, of the body or the blood, introduces a different understanding of variety and a different way to measure it: the body itself, with its innate inclinations and desires, is not the product of human speech or laws. Where law and teaching can suffice for the mass of men

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[37] Nemean 7

with less nature or less reality—it has its place in ensuring the public peace and the humble dignity of the commons—convention can't explain the highest achievements, highest *areta* or highest arts, for it has little or no part in the ultimate cause of these. Nomos or convention homogenizes and equalizes, this is its purpose: if behavior at its peak, however, is primarily explained by inheritance and blood, this necessarily decreases not only the explanatory power of *nomos* regarding human behavior and variety, but its authority and dignity.

> If a man has devoted his whole spirit to excellence, sparing neither expense nor toils, it is right to grant the boast of manliness to those who achieve excellence, with an ungrudging [45] mind. For it is an easy gift for a wise man to speak words of praise in recompense for labors of all kinds and thus to promote the common good. Different wages for different deeds are sweet to men, to the shepherd and the ploughman and the bird-trapper, and the man whom the sea nourishes. Every man is intent upon keeping persistent famine from his belly. [50] But he who wins rich renown in the games or in war receives the highest gain: to be well spoken of by his fellow-citizens and by strangers, the choicest bloom of speech.[38]

The purpose of *nomos* is to "keep persistent famine from the belly"—preservation of mere life. When *nomos* or convention outsteps this or pretends to, when it is forgotten that "he who wins rich renown in the games or in war" belongs to a different reality and owes his origins to a different principle, then *nomos* becomes something else, it becomes a systematic and perverse covering-up of nature, party to the forgetfulness of nature and the hierarchy between man and man that exists in nature. The highest type of man is the product of a breeding program, and not of an educational program of *nomos.* The boast of manliness, *andreia,* is alone granted to such a man; other males are not men, *andres,* but mere *anthropoi,*

[38] Isthmian 1

indistinct beings with anthropoid form.[39] This man is driven by the impetus of his blood with such vehemence that all the common laws, all of *nomos,* would for him be a Procrustes' bed: it is best for such a man to follow the inclinations of his nature and not *nomos.* The product of his action is *areta,* loosely translated as virtue or excellence.

[25] Various men have various arts. It is right for a man to follow straight paths, and strive according to his nature [*phuai*]. For strength manifests itself in action, and intelligence in counsels, for those who have the inborn [*sungenes*] skill of foreseeing the future.[40]

Men pursuing high achievement should strive according to nature [*marnasthai phuai*] and not be misled or "educated" by convention or teaching. The "standard" high achievement for a man is to possess *areta*—and let us remember that "virtue" here refers ultimately to the ability to be a good leader in war, namely to possess *andreia* and *phronesis,* battle prowess and ability to give good war counsel: "strength manifests itself in action, and intelligence in counsels." Convention, speech, can't mandate or teach this. Like the art of the wise man, Pindar's own art, which is analogous to the art of the king—more on this shortly—it is inborn. Though a certain kind of training may be necessary to cultivate it, this is not primarily a matter of *being taught,* and certainly not being taught by *nomos* or custom, but of being *bred.* The primary function of *nomos* is "social control," homogenization, taming, tribal survival, the continuation and preservation of mere life—through a regime of commands, speech and teaching that covers up and suppresses nature. Excellence, virtue, on the other hand, is a matter of nature, of

[39] A distinction commonly remarked upon by Allan Bloom and other students of Strauss; see e.g., *Love and Friendship* 1993, part 3 "The Ladder of Love"
[40] Nemean 1

blood, and it cannot be taught.[41] Maybe the climax of Pindar's thoughts on nature are revealed in this explicitly negative attitude to teaching, the taught, what we might call the "try-hards":

> A man with inborn [*sungenes*] glory has great weight; but he who has only learned is a man in darkness, breathing changeful purposes, never taking an unwavering step, but trying his hand at countless forms of excellence [*areta*] with his ineffectual thought.[42]

*Areta*, excellence, or virtue, is the matter at hand here. The prerequisite is that it must be inborn, or rather, that an orientation and ability for *areta* is inborn; it is not learned. And, more significantly given the discussion above, the word here used for those who have merely learned is *psephenos:* the dark, obscure, dim. This same thought is echoed in another ode where Pindar repeats,

> That which is inborn/by nature [*phuai*] is always the best; but many men strive to win glory with excellence that comes from training. Anything in which a god has no part is none the worse for being quelled in silence. For some roads [105] lead farther than others, and a single occupation will not nourish us all. The paths to skill are steep; but, while offering this prize of song, boldly shout aloud [110] that this man, by the blessing of the gods, was born with deftness of hand and litheness of limb, and with valor in his eyes and at the banquet of Aias son of Oileus he laid his victorious garland on the altar.[43]

The men who learn only, who seek *didaktais aretais,* "learned excellences," are men in darkness and in silence. Men who have not just a different nature, *but who have sufficient nature, who have more nature, more reality,* are revealed, become apparent or emerge to the sight of the seer as if from a primordial and

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[41] On this precise point, that nature cannot be taught, that good and bad can't be taught, see Theognis 429-38: "To beget and breed [***phusai kai threpsai***] a man is easier than to put into him a noble mind; none hath ever devised means whereby he hath made a fool wise and a bad man good. If God had given the Children of Asclepius the art of healing a man's badness and base wit, they would receive wages much and great; and if thought could be made and put into us, the son of a good father would never become bad, because he would be persuaded by good counsel. But by teaching never shalt thou make the bad man good."

[42] Nemean 3

[43] Olympian 9

undifferentiated swamp or morass. This is the world of *nomos,* the world of the many—it should be clear from Pindar's depreciation of conventional learning or training ("those who have only learned," "learned excellence") that by corollary *nomos* itself, whatever utilitarian value it may have in maintaining an illusion of common good or common peace, has no value when it comes to the most important thing, virtue itself. For *nomos* stands or falls by teaching, conventional training, inculcation. But it cannot teach virtue, the arts of leadership, physical strength and daring, or wisdom. Indeed, convention likely has a *negative* value insofar as it is an expression of collective ignorance and forgetfulness, not privy to the light of truth: this last only emerges as in a flash through *phusis,* body, blood, biological breeding made apparent through great action.

There is a sense in which Pindar does approve of training—it would be absurd for an observer of athletic life to do otherwise.[44] But this is a very particular kind of training, and when we look more closely, the kind of training Pindar extols only reinforces the impression so far regarding the relationship between *phusis, nomos,* nature and the city's arts, breeding and taming:

> ...let Hagesidamus, victorious as a boxer at Olympia, offer thanks to Ilas, just as Patroclus did to Achilles. [20] With the help of a god, one man can sharpen another who is born for excellence, and encourage him to tremendous achievement. Without toil only a few have attained joy, a light of life above all labors.[45]

The phrase above, "born for excellence" is rather more concrete that this in Greek: *phunt'aretai,* perhaps quite literally "grown for *areta,*" or rather bred for

[44] The trainer in fact is often included at least in a passing mention in many odes, as this was part of Pindar's contract; a clear example is at the very end of Isthmian 4, where both Melissus and his wise trainer are praised in the conclusion.
[45] Olympian 10

*areta* as one might breed a plant or stallion for a particular purpose. For a man indeed who has this nature or blood, a good trainer is indispensible, for he can "sharpen" or "excite" him [*thexais*]. This is similar to the terms in which Pindar praises another trainer elsewhere as a "Naxian whetstone"[46] for sharpening athletes. There is for now only a hint as to the general kind of training this concerns, and we can be sure it is *not* "conventional" training of any kind. For the "ultimate" trainer and teacher in Pindar's work—indeed the only instance where the word "teaching," *didaskalian,* is used with positive meaning—is Chiron the Centaur.

The passage quoted above where "inborn glory" is contrasted with "those who have learned" precedes a mention of Chiron, and should really be quoted in full:

> A man with inborn glory has great weight; but he who has only learned is a man in darkness, breathing changeful purposes, never taking an unwavering step, but trying his hand at countless forms of excellence with his ineffectual thought. But golden-haired Achilles, staying in the home of Philyra as a child, played at great deeds, often [45] brandishing in his hands a javelin with a short blade; swift as the wind, he dealt death to wild lions in battle, and he slew wild boars and carried their panting bodies to the Centaur, son of Cronus, first when he was six years old, and afterwards for all the time he spent there. [50] Artemis and bold Athena gazed at him with wonder, as he slew deer without the help of dogs and crafty nets; for he excelled with his feet. I have this story as it was told by earlier generations. Deep-thinking Cheiron reared Jason under his stone roof, and later Asclepius, [55] whom he taught the gentle-handed laws of remedies. And he arranged a marriage for Peleus with the lovely-bosomed daughter of Nereus, and brought up for her their incomparable child, nurturing his spirit with all fitting things, so that when the blasts of the sea-winds sent him [60] to Troy, he might withstand the spear-clashing war-shout of the Lycians and Phrygians and Dardanians; and when he came into close conflict with the spear-bearing Ethiopians, he might fix it in his mind that their leader, powerful Memnon the kinsman of Helenus, should not return to his home. From that point the light of the Aeacids has been fixed to shine far. [65] Zeus, it is your blood and your contest at which my song aimed its shot, shouting the joy of this land with the voices of young men.[47]

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[46] See at the end of Isthmian 6; the same image of sharpening the spirit is one that Xenophon uses in the *Education of Cyrus* 1.2.11 etc.

[47] Nemean 3

Chiron is responsible not only for the raising and training of heroes—he teaches them, most significantly, the gentle remedies of natural plants[48]—but also for their breeding; for he has arranged Achilles' very conception. The word used to describe Chiron in another ode is *agroteron,* of the fields, or "beast of the wild"[49]—a term that, as we will later see, Plato uses to describe Socrates himself at a crucial point in the *Gorgias* (and elsewhere as well). This is not an accident. Chiron is the teacher of heroes for a reason; he is the ultimate trainer or cultivator or "sharpener" of inner breeding and nature. This training can only take place outside the city—this is not education by convention or by the city. The reader may be reminded of Machiavelli's own esoteric interpretation of this fact:

> You must know there are two ways of contesting, the one by the law, the other by force; the first method is proper to men, the second to beasts; but because the first is frequently not sufficient, it is necessary to have recourse to the second. Therefore it is necessary for a prince to understand how to avail himself of the beast and the man. This has been figuratively taught to princes by ancient writers, who describe how Achilles and many other princes of old were given to the Centaur Chiron to nurse, who brought them up in his discipline; which means solely that, as they had for a teacher one who was half beast and half man, so it is necessary for a prince to know how to make use of both natures, and that one without the other is not durable.[50]

One doesn't need to accept the whole of Machiavelli's interpretation to see here that the question impressing itself on any reader's mind is why it should be necessary for heroes to have, as their archetypal trainer, a half-man half-beast who lives outside cities and is called *agroteros,* of the wild, a wild beast. Pindar at least has made it clear in the longer passage quoted above that this is pretty much the

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[48]Recall that one of the only two mentions of *phusis* in all Homer is when Odysseus, in a dream, is shown the secret *phusis* of a healing plant by Hermes. The knowledge of the healing properties of plants appears to be a de facto stock example of "teaching nature," which is the function of Chiron.
[49] From Pythian 3, which begins with an invocation to Chiron: "If it were proper for this commonplace prayer to be made by my tongue, I would want Cheiron the son of Philyra to be alive again, he who has departed, the wide-ruling son of Cronus son of Uranus; and I would want him to reign again in the glens of Pelion, the beast of the wilds [5] whose mind was friendly to men..." and proceeds to an explanation of the arts that Chiron taught Asclepius.
[50] Machiavelli *Prince* XVIII

only kind of training and teaching that is legitimate. And of course, whatever other reason there may be on top of this, the basic conclusion must also be Machiavelli's conclusion, that the law, convention, *nomos* is insufficient, that it fails in the crucial respect, which, in Machiavelli's case, is the education of princes and captains of the people. Regardless, we need not and cannot concern ourselves with what precisely it is that Cheiron taught his charges, which is what any good trainer must do to sharpen and excite the inborn nature of his student. The basic message is obvious, that such training consists, at least from the point of view of *nomos,* in a *re-barbarization,* and a de-civilization or de-"nomo-fication."

It could be said that Pindar, like Machiavelli, even goes so far as to explain *which* animal natures a man of nature must raise up from within himself to succeed. It is most interesting that Machiavelli continues above,

> A prince, therefore, being compelled knowingly to adopt the beast, ought to choose the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the snares and a lion to terrify the wolves. Those who rely simply on the lion do not understand what they are about. Therefore a wise lord cannot, nor ought he to, keep faith when such observance may be turned against him, and when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer. [51]

Of course Pindar himself refers to just this example of the fox and the lion, and more than once. For example, at *Olympian* 11, where he says that neither the loud-roaring lion, nor the fiery fox change their "ingrown character" [*emphues ethos*]. This is in the context of discussing the noble stock of the victor, Hagesidamus of Western Locris, who hails from a race [*genos*] that is hospitable, beauty-loving, and, crucially, both *akrosophos*—most wise—and *aikhmetes*—warlike. And,

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[51] ibid

moreover, a people of whom Pindar is giving the Muses a surety that their bred character will not change, that is, change in the crucial respect of having both the fox (wisdom/prudence) and the lion (warlike spirit/strength).[52] Even more strikingly, Pindar uses the example of the lion and the fox in the fourth Isthmian Ode to the fighter Melissus, already considered several times in this chapter. The context is especially significant given Machiavelli's claims:

> ...if one says something well, that saying goes forth speaking with an immortal voice. And the radiance of fine deeds, forever unquenchable, has crossed the fruitful earth and the sea. May we win the favor of the Muses and kindle that torch of song, a worthy garland from the pancratium [45] for Melissus, too, the scion of the race of Telesias. For in the toil of conflict he resembles the spirit of loud-roaring lions in boldness, while in wisdom he is like the fox, who forestalls the swoop of the eagle by falling on her back. And it is right to do anything to blot out one's enemy.

This concerns a race of leaders who have bred both the lion and the fox—war-spirit, and wisdom, *andreia* and *phronesis*—within themselves and for their offspring. Breeding and education to nature is then literally a re-wilding, an animalization, a beastliness, a breeding of beastly character. This by corollary is and must be an escape from *nomos,* the conventions of the city and the many, from pious and mediocre platitudes and moralisms, from the conventions of peace. Nature, the truth about the world and about man, erupts into being, into radiance, or the light of knowledge, from the obscurity of the primordial darkness and forgetfulness in which mortal *anthropoi* are doomed to live. The coming-about of such a nature, or body, is by physical breeding, and its training is a re-wilding, carried out beyond the walls of the city and of convention.

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[52] In this we also see again how *phusis,* breeding, blood, is *the* surety of truth, even for a divine audience of Muses. It is what persists.

*V. Irrepressible Character of Nature as Opposed to Convention*

For Pindar, whatever part human envy, the many, and convention has in covering up the truth and suppressing or distorting nature—whether through active suppression, through miseducation, or by some other means—nature is always by far the stronger part, and, unlike Plato, who is in so many other things his student, Pindar seems to remain confident that the wild and overweening nature of his aristocrats will never fail to express itself and emerge in great and violent deeds. This is because, to repeat the crucial fact that must be realized about the idea of nature at its conception, it is not only a matter of *kind* or *quality—i.e.,* not only a matter of inclination or orientation to certain activities or objects of desire—but primarily one of *intensity.* The adjective Pindar most often uses to call the noble, the *esloi* or *esthloi,* comes directly from the verb *esthai,* "to be." This should be read quite literally: they are organisms who have *more being;* it is a question of having sufficient *amount of nature* within oneself. Nietzsche's words on this matter, which we will have occasion to consider at greater length in a future chapter, should nevertheless be reproduced here as well,

> They call themselves "the truthful," above all the Greek nobility...The word developed for this characteristic, *ἐσθλος [esthlos: fine, noble],* indicates, according to its root meaning, a man who *is,* who possesses reality, who really exists, who is true. Then, with a subjective transformation, it indicates the true man as the truthful man. In this phase of conceptual transformation it becomes the slogan and catch phrase for the nobility, and its sense shifts entirely over to mean "aristocratic," to mark a distinction from the *lying* common man, as Theognis takes and presents him...[53]

[53] Nietzsche GM I.5

Pindar maintains the earlier meaning of "noble," of *esthlos,* of an organism that has more being, more reality. The nature or breeding of Pindar's heroes and aristocrats is so vehement as to be almost not suppressible. This attitude appears vividly in one of the most beautiful passages from his opus, the assembly of adventurers known as the Argonauts—one of the longest, if not the longest, myths recounted in all of Pindar, and a proper recapitulation of the entire drama of *phusis-nomos,* which we will see again repeated with special force in certain of Plato's dialogues.

Jason returns to his homeland to reclaim his rightful place as king. Asked who he is by a stranger he says, most strikingly, that he has come to bring "the teaching of Cheiron":

> "I say that I am going to bring the teaching of Cheiron; for I come from his cave, from the presence of Chariclo and Philyra, where the holy daughters of the Centaur raised me. Living twenty years without [105] having said or done anything shameful in their house, I have come to my home to recover the ancient honor of my father, now held improperly, which once Zeus granted to Aeolus, the leader of the people, and to his sons. For I hear that lawless Pelias, yielding to his empty mind, [110] violently robbed it from my parents, who were the rulers by right.[54]

Jason had been given to Cheiron when the usurper Pelias took power. A series of "crafty" trickeries follow this introduction—Jason, as we have seen, is well-trained by Cheiron in the mode of the fox and will seduce Medea with his knowledge to achieve his task—wherein Pelias claims that he will give up the royal power if Jason returns the golden fleece.[55] What follows is one of the most rousing episodes

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[54] Pythian 4 to Arkesilas; see also below on Pythian 5 to the same king/tyrant.

[55] Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, who have published the most comprehensive and, to date, authoritative linguistic account of the origins of Indo-European languages (*Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans: A Reconstruction and Historical Analysis of a Proto-Language and a Proto-Culture,* De Gruyter Mouton

in Greek literature (as always, very inadequately translated here), in which Jason calls upon his companions—he calls them knights, *hippotes*—to embark on a great adventure of danger and glory:

> And Jason himself at once [170] sent messengers everywhere to announce the voyage. Soon there came the three sons, untiring in battle, whom dark-eyed Alcmena and Leda bore to Zeus son of Cronus; and two high-haired men, sons of the earth-shaker, **obeying their innate valor,** one from Pylos and the other from the headland of Taenarus; you both achieved [175] noble fame, Euphemus and wide-ruling Periclymenus. And from Apollo the lyre-player came, the father of songs, much-praised Orpheus. And Hermes of the golden wand sent two sons to take part in the unabating toil, Echion and Erytus, bursting with youth. Swiftly [180] came those that dwell around the foothills of Mount Pangaeon, for with a smiling spirit their father Boreas, king of the winds, quickly and willingly equipped Zetes and Calais with purple wings bristling down their backs. And Hera kindled in the demigods an all-persuasive sweet longing [185] for the ship Argo, so that no one would be left behind to stay by his mother's side, nursing a life without danger, **but even at the risk of death would find the finest elixir of excellence together with his other companions.**[56]

This is a recreation of the primeval *Mannerbund, morya, comitatus* or, in Greek, *kouros, ephebes, hetairia,* the society of young warriors, mentioned already in the first chapter—the raw material or most basic form from which, as we will see, the philosophical brotherhoods and schools of a later time will take their form as from an archetype.[57] The story that may be recounted here regarding the relationship of *phusis* and *nomos* would be roughly as follows: conventional society is built on the lies of a usurper (Pelias in this case, Agamemnon in the *Iliad;* both stand-ins for *nomos,* the tribe, the collectivity, the many and their lies about good and bad). A young man of wild nature—Jason, or Achilles—who has been bred for

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1995) claim in "The Early History of Indo-European Languages" *Scientific American*, March 1990, pp. 110-116 that the myth of the golden fleece had special significance for the Greeks; that, indeed, it was the only national memory of their original homeland in the Caucasus, and that the voyage of the Argonauts is in a way an "inverted" memory of the sailing voyage from their original homeland to mainland Greece itself.

[56] Pythian 4

[57] See, again Beckwith 2009 pp.151-2, who similarly claims that the Buddhist *sangha* or male monastic order at least in Tibet has its origins in the steppe institution of Mongol "companions" *nokod* that is just the Turkic version of the Indo-European *hird/comitatus.*

power and trained in the wilderness by Cheiron the man-beast, returns to claim his place as ruler by superior right—superior physical power and daring, and superior prudence, or counsel in war.[58] The false king, the suppressor and usurper of nature—Pelias, Agamemnon, *king nomos*—through trickery, perfidy or cowardice casts out the hero and his companions from the realm. The hero and his young companions are now an independent society of warriors or pirates on the outskirts of society, superior by nature, but outside all law and custom. They undertake many hard tasks and adventures, loving danger and exhibiting contempt for mere life and for death. They return to take power as rightful rulers of their society or become rulers of a new society, which they take by superior physical force and by trickery, often winning the daughters of the false kings. Is it possible that in this drama of Jason or Achilles, and of quite a few others, we see the survival in mythical form of the kinds of stories that actual bands of young warriors—cast out from their tribes and societies in the ritual of the *comitatus* that existed in the deepest Greek pre-history—told among themselves to explain their outcast condition, their experiences, and even their final success after they became founders of new states?[59] But it was for precisely this reason that in a previous chapter it was speculated that the concept of nature itself originates in part with this institution that *uniquely,* first existed *outside law and convention* and subsisted by a principle totally different from this.

[58] Perhaps to be interpreted, in its most primitive iteration, as ability to set up a good *ambush.*
[59] Again, at least Romulus' *luperci* did found such a state, see Brown & Anthony 2012 and Alfoldi 1974

The most striking phrase in this entire passage just quoted, however, is regarding the "two high-haired men, sons of the earth-shaker, who, *obeying their inner valor,*" could not resist Jason's call for adventure and danger of death. The actual phrase is *aidesthentes alkan,* and would be more literally translated as "in awe/ashamed of their own great daring." This is entirely in keeping with the earlier passage from Isthmian 7 discussed above, wherein "Strepsiades... is the victor in the pancratium at the Isthmus, both awesome in his strength and handsome to look at; *and he treats/holds excellence [areta] as not uglier/more shameful/inferior to body [phue].* He is made radiant by the violet-haired Muses..." The power of *phua* is irresistible, its calling must be obeyed. The "divine blood" in the aristocrats that Pindar claims could not "sit still." He maintains the older understanding of "noble" that Nietzsche mentions—the noble, *the esthloi,* are simply those that have more being, more reality, *more vehemence,* who emerge from the obscure darkness of mortal men into the radiance of eternal fame through great deeds of *areta.* They are in religious awe—*aideomai* is a verb often used with reference to divine or religious objects and totems—of their own inner violence or daring and can't resist its call. This impetuousness is precisely what they were bred for. For this reason maybe he believed that no law or regime could ever restrain excellence, nor really ever be responsible for its having emerged. *Areta* and by extension the biological fundamental *phusis* from which it emerges is beyond all convention, all law, all regime, and can co-opt, prosper under, or take over any; it is the only thing that is "regime-independent" or "convention-independent": "Under all laws the straight-

spoken[60] man excels, whether by the side of a tyranny, or whenever the furious mob, or when the wise watch over the city."[61]

*VI. The Wise and Wisdom in Pindar*

A well-known objection that Socrates makes about the poets, in particular dramatic poets, is that they "hide" themselves in their works. Pindar most emphatically doesn't hide himself. He makes frequent references not just to himself but—especially relevant in the context of the debate here hinted at—also to his art, his wisdom, and the relationship between his wisdom and that of others, or of conventional wisdom. But can one from this alone deduce that Pindar himself is a philosopher? The answer must be that he is not; he refers to the wise and perhaps to himself as wise *(sophos)* but not to himself as a lover of wisdom. Nevertheless his place in the famous "war between philosophy and poetry," already prominent in Plato and frequently commented on by many recent and insightful readers of Plato who are concerned with the relationship between the philosopher and the city—Pindar's role in this "war" is necessarily quite ambiguous. This is not only because, unlike, say, Aristophanes, he frequently points to himself, his art *and also* to the relationship of wisdom to learning, of wisdom to convention, and so on—but also because, as we have seen, he frequently speaks of nature. Now, a crucial and frequently-quoted passage in the discussion of the war between philosophy and poetry comes from Aristotle, wherein he says that the philosophers are the first to

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[60] See above, Nietzsche on the original meaning of straight-spoken, truthful, *esthlos,* "carrying being." "The man of nature excels under all laws, all regimes."
[61] Pythian 2.86-8

think about nature (*phusis*) whereas those who came before philosophers did not, but rather thought and talked about tales or myths—they were not *philosophoi,* whose existence stands or falls by the discovery of nature, but *philomythoi.*[62] What then to make of Pindar's place in all this, who both talks endlessly about myths and frequently about nature? But doesn't Plato do the same?

Before we speculate on the particular relationship Pindar has to the philosophers and to philosophy—for now I would provisionally repeat my own thesis, that philosophy and tyranny are radicalizations of the aristocratic worldview of Pindar—let's look at Pindar's own explicit words on wisdom and on the origins of his own art. Most significant and entirely in keeping with what we have seen so far as regards the relationship between learning and excellence—in this case the excellence specifically of wisdom—Pindar says,

> I have many swift arrows in the quiver under my arm, [85] arrows that speak to the initiated. But the masses need interpreters. **The wise man knows many things by nature, while those who have only learned chatter with violent and indiscriminate tongues in vain like crows against the divine bird of Zeus.** Now, bend your bow toward the mark; tell me, my mind, whom are we trying to hit [90] as we shoot arrows of fame from a gentle mind? I will aim at Acragas, and speak with true intent a word sworn by oath: no city for a hundred years has given birth to a man more beneficent in his mind or more generous with his hand [95] than Theron.[63]

The wise man knows many things by his nature, in his blood or body—*sophos ho polla eidos phuai.* Those who have merely learned produce just a lot of chatter—in particular violent, indiscriminate chatter that covers up with its boisterous sound and superiority in number the calm and elevated, but veiled, truth that the wise man speaks to the initiated. The image of the chattering crows who gang up against the

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[62] Aristotle *Metaphysics* 982b, where, of course, he also says that the lover of myth is in some way a philosopher, similarly moved by wonder.
[63] Olympian 2 for Theron tyrant of Akragas.

divine bird of Zeus, the eagle, is especially important—as clear as possible an image of the ubiquitous demotic darkness of *nomos* attempting to cover up the emergence of *phusis* and its elucidation by the wise man. The eagle, lone, solitary, watchful, all-seeing, inhabiting the high, radiant cold air of the enduring gods, free from the gravity and cares of mere life; against the social, chattering, cackling birds who try to overwhelm with noise and number. This image reappears elsewhere. The eagle is a totem of Pindar and appears again at significant occasions: "The eagle is swift among birds: he swoops down from afar, and suddenly seizes with his talons his blood-stained quarry; but chattering daws stay closer to the ground."[64] The wise man possesses a great eye—an "inborn eye." He is on the hunt for prey,[65] for truth or insight about the world, which is snatched up in one bold move from afar, from high up, or hit from afar as an archer hits his target.[66] The art of seeing, of bringing out forgotten truths into the radiant light, in short, wisdom, is an inborn art, it is knowledge by nature or by the blood. By contrast those who have learned—whether it be the mass of the many [*to pan*] who need interpreters—or their representatives, the "learned," the *mathontes,* the pursuers of the *didaktai aretai,* that is, the try-hards and intellectuals who are utterly demotic and conventional; these produce mere chatter. Wisdom is a matter of silent insight from afar, an inborn skill; it is not a matter of discussion, endless words, the boisterous chatter of the envious. This latter is the province of the undifferentiated and ignorant many and their flatterers,

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[64] Nemean 3

[65] Another instance of a word with root in *agra*—especially important as we will see later in the secretly "wild" Socrates of Plato.

[66] The Apollonian associations of the all-seeing archer, who hits his mark as the wise man hits the mark of truth should not be discounted. Apollo of course is the god of prophecy and second sight; see below on Pindar's "inborn arts" of prophecy and the "inborn eye."

this is the darkness of *nomos* that seeks to drown out with its violence and sound the radiance of wisdom, to suppress the wise man, to suppress *phua.*[67]

Pindar is even more specific about the way in which "the wise man knows many things in his blood." When he refers to his own art and ability, or to the arts of prophecy and poetry more generally, he calls them *sungonoisin tekhnais,* "inborn arts," using the same word, *sungenes,* inborn, that we have seen repeatedly above. This following passage is important on many counts, especially when we keep in mind the myths about how Socrates himself came to his "art":

**By nature the genuine spirit of the fathers [45] is conspicuous in the sons.** I clearly see Alcmaeon, wielding a dappled serpent on his blazing shield, the first at the gates of Cadmus. And he who suffered in the earlier disaster, the hero Adrastus, now has the tidings of a better [50] bird of omen. But at home his luck will be the opposite. For he alone of the Danaan army will gather the bones of his dead son, by the fortune sent from the gods, and come with his people unharmed [55] to the spacious streets of Argos, the city of Abas." So spoke Amphiaraus. **And I myself rejoice as I fling garlands over Alcmaeon and sprinkle him with song, because this hero is my neighbor and guardian of my possessions, and he met me when I was going to the songful navel of the earth, [60] *and he touched on prophecies with his inborn arts.* And you, Apollo, shooting from afar, you who govern the glorious temple, hospitable to all, in the hollows of Pytho, there you granted the greatest of joys.**[68]

The navel of the earth is Delphi, where Pindar received "the greatest of joys" from Apollo, and he learned, from the spirit of a previous prophet, how to muster his "inborn arts." Pindar's arts, the skills of the wise man, are inborn, are not taught. The origin of wisdom, like all *areta,* is ultimately divine, and appears as a divine gift; Pindar is quite explicit on this in other places as well: "All the resources for the achievements of mortal excellence come [*ephun*] from the gods; for wisdom, or

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[67] If there is some emphasis and repetition here on my part this is nevertheless appropriate: for, as we will see, these same images will appear again in Plato at most significant moments, when the relationships between the philosopher, convention or the city, and tyranny, are explicitly discussed.
[68] Pythian 8; I quote a longer passage from earlier, with extension in bold, as it makes it easier to see how Pindar explicitly connects the wise man and the origin of wisdom with the more general claims in the first part regarding the persistence of inner nature across generations bred for *areta.*

having powerful arms, or an eloquent tongue."[69] However, as we have seen above on so many occasions, this is so only in the sense that the genealogies of blood and body in which such excellences are transferred are ultimately traceable back to a divine or semi-divine progenitor, who engendered a new race or who, like Cheiron, set up a fortuitous marriage for good breeding: the word used here for "come" is *ephun,* again from *phuo:* are grown, bred from the gods.

It should not be imagined that such claims are directly "magical" or "oracular" in the pejorative sense used by certain modern commentators on Plato, e.g., Karl Popper or his followers. Socrates as well is said from numerous sources—not just Plato—to have received his entirely rational, satirical, sarcastic mission of "gadfly" and indeed his entire assembly of "logical" arts from a divine source, whether this is, as in the case of Pindar, Apollo at Delphi, or otherwise a much darker and more titanic force.[70] In both cases the claim may be interpreted as an argument against the conceit that wisdom, like courage or manliness, can be learned or is a matter of convention or of "education by the city." They are divine gifts, ultimately gifts of the blood.

Let us summarize for a moment Pindar's thoughts on wisdom and knowledge, and the relationship of these to nature and convention. While Pindar may be somewhat vague and mysterious about the way in which "the wise man knows many things by his nature," as opposed to those who have merely learned,

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[69] Pythian 1; note again the two major virtues, having powerful arms [*andreia*] and having an eloquent tongue/giving good counsel [*phronesis*]. To this is now added a third, wisdom.
[70] Typhon, see Plato *Phaedrus* 230a; Typhon is also associated with the "navel of the earth" and is possibly defeated or incorporated by Apollo himself. See also Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* Oxford 1995 pp. 448-62 on Typhon, which touches on the Pindaric treatment of the same.

who live in darkness and produce deafening, obscuring chatter, nevertheless a few obvious observations relevant to my main argument can now be made: Wisdom, like the other true virtues or *areta,* can't be taught, but is a matter of the blood. The wise man—and later, by extension, the philosopher—is not taught or nurtured so much as he must be *bred;* at most he is a lucky accident. His education, insofar as it is at all possible, takes place "outside the city," whether under the tutelage of a god who reveals to the philosopher (or the wise man) his mission and his "inborn arts," or under the tutelage of a being like Cheiron, who is half-man half-beast and who Apollo himself must consult on matters of nature and breeding.[71] This education in other words must consist, again, of a "de-nomofication," a de-civilization and "rewilding." To be frank, of a barbarization, at least as seen from the point of view that identifies civilization with domesticity.[72] By contrast in this process *nomos,* convention, and its representatives as embodied in those who have learned, if it does have any purpose, it is to thwart the growth and to cover up genuine insight into nature—knowledge as the result of the "hunt" for "prey"—and its transmission, and to replace it with an entirely sham and shadow "knowledge," with cant that only has the purpose of the self-preservation of the many.

Finally, the object of investigation of the philosopher—nature, *phusis,* by which philosophy itself stands or falls—is itself at its origin only apparent as blood.

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[71] Pythian 9

[72] And we must be frank. Both Pindar and later Plato do not speak in the abstract of "escaping conventional opinion" in the carefree sense a modern would. They repeatedly use words like *agroteron* or *agrios,* referring to the wild barbarism of the fields and nature, of beast-men like Cheiron, or of Machiavelli's "teaching of force," images of raw force or violence which will become especially important in the *Gorgias*—in an example used by Socrates, not Callicles. As we will see, it will be Socrates who brings up the problem of physical force in a "polite" conversation about rhetoric.

That is, it emerges from the ubiquity and homogeneity and darkness of convention, becomes apparent to the perception of the wise man as a fact of biological breeding. In this it has rather the character of a revelation or a manifestation to the immediate perception, rather than a discovery by logical deduction. Nature is made manifest to the seer and poet through the observation of botanical or animal life, and through the persistence of inherited qualities across generations.

*VII. The Possible Connection of Wisdom, the "Inborn Arts," to Kingship or Leadership*

Pindar himself makes an overt connection between his own arts—between wisdom—and the other "inborn" virtues and nature in an even stronger way than we have seen so far. And furthermore Pindar makes a connection to kingship or leadership that, while mysterious in character, nevertheless should be considered here in the conclusion, however briefly. We have already seen part of the following passage in which Pindar in close succession uses both the words *phua* and *sungenes:*

> It is his lot to have noble friends to bring against his slanderers, like water against smoke. [25] Various men have various skills. It is right for a man to follow straight paths, and strive according to his nature [*phuai*]. For strength manifests itself in action, and intelligence in counsels, for those who have the inborn [*sungenes*] skill of foreseeing the future.[73]

The last phrase is important because it connects the "inborn" art of foreseeing the future [*essomenon proidein*]—Pindar's own inborn art, the art of the wise—with both physical strength that is manifested in action and with *phren* or *phronesis,* which is manifested in good counsels. This is a restatement of the old Homeric formula we have seen repeatedly—virtue or *areta* as *andreia* and *phronesis,* the virtues of leadership in war, the modes of the lion and the fox, most

[73] Nemean 1

prized by the aristocrats, and the end to which the aristocratic breeding project is specifically directed. But it is not clear what Pindar is hinting at here; it is not clear from the language used what the connection here is to the art of foreseeing the future. One obvious reading is that wisdom is just another of the great excellences that are bred, much like physical strength, beauty, or prudence; and that the wise man is the close kin or brother of those other excellent men, but that each has his own "art" or specific kind of excellence, and it is best for each to struggle according to his own specific nature [*marnasthai phuai*].[74]

But there is a more interesting interpretation, encouraged not only by Pindar's list here, but by similar phrases he uses elsewhere. First of all, although this list appears as a "list of the various excellences different men should, by their different natures, strive for according to straight paths—whether strength, or prudence, or the foreseeing of the future"—there is obviously some sense in which at least the first two, strength and prudence, are "twins" or should be, if possible, connected in the same person in the best-case outcome. We have already seen how as early as Homer, and surely before, these two, battlefield prowess and the giving of good counsel in war, are the virtues of leadership or kingship and should ideally exist together in the same king. It may be that Nestor is better at counsel and Aias or Diomedes better at *andreia* and strength, but all are expected to possess both to some extent, and the supreme gentlemen, Achilles and Odysseus, are good at both. Now, in the *Iliad,* the mantic Kalkhas, who had the gift of knowing "the things that were, that are, and that will be" and who is possessed in his trances by Apollo, is

[74] Nemean 1

used by Achilles in the assembly when giving counsel to make his case to the other kings. Thus in Homer the "inborn gift" of prophecy appears as helper or "adviser" to the rightful king, who does not himself, however, possess this. Nor, conversely, does the seer or prophet or mantic ever rule directly. Kalkhas, holder of the *areta* of wisdom perhaps, is threatened by Agamemnon, but Achilles, holder of the *areta* of manliness and prudence, immediately steps in to protect him. In this dramatic early form we already have the arrogant and self-serving mediocrity of convention threatening the insight of the wise, who must then be protected by the gentleman Achilles, holder of the remaining two "kingly" virtues. The "inborn skill" of knowing, or the virtue of wisdom in its most "primitive" form, thus appears as an ancillary branch of the "breeding regime" previously mentioned. Together with *andreia* and *phronesis*—the twin virtues of the king—the *sungenes* skill of *essomenon proidein,* of second sight, appears as a deliberate means of producing "the wise,"[75] who will act as helpmeets and advisers to the king, and who will in turn protect the wise.

A second possibility, however, is that Pindar believes the last-named art, the knowing of the future, the skill that is the product of the virtue of wisdom, is a distillation of the other two, especially the last—prudence—or perhaps that it itself can be united with the other two in the same person. And we see that Pindar indeed at other times in his odes implies this last-named skill, the skill of the wise man, will be united with the other two *in the same person,* to create, as it were, as super-king, or a king or ruler who is also "wise" in the sense used. Consider the following two

[75] Remember that Kalkhas knew not just the future, but was expert also at knowing the things that are, and the things that were. He led the Akhaian fleet to Troy, the way having been revealed to him in a mania inspired by Apollo.

instances where Pindar refers to a mysterious "eye" or an "inborn eye" belonging to a leader. In one case he praises Arkesilas, "king" of Cyrene,

> Wealth is widely powerful, whenever a mortal man receives it, blended with pure excellence, from the hands of fortune, and takes it as a companion that makes many friends. [5] Arcesilas, favored by the gods, from the first steps of your famous life you seek for it with glory, by the grace of Castor with his golden chariot, [10] who, after the wintry storm, sheds calm on your blessed hearth. **Wise men are better able to bear even god-given power.** Great prosperity surrounds you, as you walk with justice. [15] First, since you are a king of great cities, **your inborn eye** looks on this as a most revered prize of honor, united with your mind; [20] and you are blessed even now, because you have already earned the boast of victory with your horses from the renowned Pythian festival, and you will welcome this victory-procession of men, a delight for Apollo.[76]

Arkesilas is implicitly referred to as both "wise" [*sophos*] and he is also said to have an "inborn eye" [*sungenes ophthalmos*]. What could this last reference mean? Let us take another strange or mysterious reference to an "eye" from Pindar's odes, a similar introduction to a "king," in this case Theron of Akragas:

> Songs, rulers of the lyre, what god, what hero, what man shall we celebrate? Indeed, Pisa belongs to Zeus; and Heracles established the Olympic festival, as the finest trophy of battle; [5] and Theron must be proclaimed because of his victorious four-horse chariot, Theron who is just in his regard for guests, and is the bulwark of Acragas, the strength of the city, the choicest bloom of illustrious ancestors, who labored much with their spirits [*thumos*], and won a sacred home by the river, and were [10] **the eye of Sicily**, their allotted lifetime attended them, bringing wealth and grace to their inborn excellence [*gnesiais aretais*].[77]

Let me speculate then on Pindar's meaning here regarding an eye, an "inborn eye"—clearly related to the "inborn arts" of foresight—and wisdom as refers to rulers. What kind of rulers are these, and where are they?

Now of course Theron is a tyrant, not a king, and in some sense the same may be said of Arkesilas, who, although not the first in his generation of rulers, does not have, in Libya, the same legitimacy that a Greek king has in Greece. They are tyrants, even if tyrants of a particular type—Sicilian tyrants in particular have been said to

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[76] Pythian 5
[77] Olympian 2

have made "considerable effort" to "conform" to aristocratic culture and standards.[78] In both cases then Pindar is not praising a traditional *basileus* in any sense. He is praising a new type of ruler. In particular he is praising dynamic[79] and powerful rulers of multiple cities, outside the Greek mainland and on the periphery of Greek civilization, who are engaged in existential colonial wars with non-Greek natives and competing Carthaginian or Phoenician interests. Theron and in particular Hieron are praised elsewhere for being the salvation of Greek civilization against the Carthaginian barbarian.[80] The general reader may be more acquainted with the famous Thermopylae as a landmark battle in the conflict between Greek and barbarian, or, in retrospect, West and East, Greek civilization—with its attendant cultivation of philosophy and the arts—and oriental barbarism and despotism. But the Greeks themselves considered the Sicilian battle of Himera equally important, where, traditionally on the same day as Thermopylae, Theron and his ally Gelo tyrant of Syracuse defended themselves against a war of extermination and broke the Carthaginian power in Sicily for a century, and arguably for good. This battle was seen traditionally as part of the same campaign as the Greco-Persian wars, part of a defensive war against a Persian-Punic global effort

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[78] See Donald Kagan *The Great Dialogue: History of Greek Political Thought from Homer to Polybius,* Greenwood 1986, pp. 1-50. In distinction to the rabble-rousing demagogues or "champions of the people" we famously see in Plato's *Republic* VIII

[79] Somewhat of a pun here, but Pindar does refer to the *dunamis* of Arkesilas in a way that he does not to the *dunamis* of any traditional aristocrat. And *dunamis* is at times coupled with the unique adjective *eknomon,* outside all law, convention, etc.

[80] On Hieron see Pindar's praise for his saving Greek civilization from the Carthaginians at Pythian 1: "I entreat you, son of Cronus, grant that the battle-shouts of the Carthaginians and Etruscans stay quietly at home, now that they have seen their arrogance bring lamentation to their ships off Cumae. Such were their sufferings, when they were conquered by the leader of the Syracusans—a fate which flung their young men from their swift ships into the sea, [75] delivering Hellas from grievous bondage."

to annihilate Greek civilization.[81] In other words, the gravity of the situation on the periphery of the Greek world was acutely felt by Greeks even well before the coming of the Persian invasions; the realities on this periphery seemed to make necessary a particular and new kind of rule, a form of non-traditional kingship, or form of "dynamic" one-man rule, expansive, energetic, ever-watchful, ever-ready to anticipate both turns of fortune and the enemy. I see no other way at least to interpret Pindar's explicit use of "wise" for Arkesilas, and unprecedented explicit reference to both Arkesilas' "inborn eye" and the bloodline of Theron as "the eye of Sicily." These are forms normally used for the art of prophecy, of foretelling, or "second sight" that belongs to the wise, or to artists, who are usually not rulers. One has then to speculate that Pindar is claiming this is a new type of ruler who unites all the separate traditional virtues that the aristocracy bred for—*andreia, phronesis,* and now, in unprecedented way, *sophia*[82]—into one man. We might call this a man of genius. One ruler who, one might say, is a fortuitous and fortunate "accident" of

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[81] A claim that has some merit based on purely ancient sources, if we consider Diodorus Siculus XI.1.1-2 It is not inconceivable that Persia directed Carthage, "cousin" to the Phoenicians then living under Persian rule, to attack Sicily simultaneously. The Phoenicians were traditional competitors of the Greeks in the Mediterranean for trade and for colonies. It is perfectly conceivable that by 480 BC, Phoenicians saw their chance to get rid of a traditional and dangerous competitor and coordinated with Carthage. Rome later took up the Greek cause and incorporated it against Carthage: Greek "culture" didn't make as big an impression on Roman civilization as did the Greek geopolitical orientation that Rome inherited. See Nietzsche TGS 356 on how Greek culture made no actual impression at Rome.

[82] Courage, prudence and wisdom or the art of foresight, the mantic art—the art of "prophecy" or of the mantic is not merely the art of telling the future by "magic," but an art of "heightened perception" wherein the realities of the natural world and of biology become vividly apparent to the awakened observer. It might be provisionally interpreted here as a "super-phronesis," or "super-prudence," the ability to see farther and deeper into nature, into the concrete situation as it appears immediately to the perception of the wise man (or the leader, in this case). The ultimate political art as it were, coupled, as we will see, with the ability to expound one's case to others, or to speak to multiple layers of an audience as Pindar himself says he does.

the breeding regime, who stands in vigilant watch over the periphery and is ready to defend it with energetic action as the "strength of the city."

If we accept even part of this reading, we see that Pindar himself, though living firmly in the aristocratic world and at the height of the aristocratic world, recognizes in some preliminary way that an aristocracy in great danger or at the point of its "decline"—on the edge of the civilized world and ever at risk of losing its liberties—produces, under emergency conditions as the final product of its program of breeding and education, a tyrant. That is, a ruler who, unlike a traditional king, is outside all *nomos,*[83] all traditional law and restraint and who, although embodying the chief aristocratic virtues in their "distilled" form—perhaps, we could say a genius—is not himself an aristocrat[84] and not bound by the limitations, customs, traditions, or orientations of any particular class. He is, in other words, aristocratic *phusis* "radicalized" and unbound. In much the same way as the philosopher, his twin, will be shown to be in the following chapters, and for much the same purpose.

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[83] Regarding the true meaning of *dunamis,* or power, recall that Pindar at Nemean 1.57-8 refers to Heracles' *dunamis* in the same phrase as his *eknomos* power or strength: often falsely translated as "supernatural," but actually "out-conventional," outside the bounds of all law and convention. *Dunamis* should be understood in this way in this context.

[84] The tyrant or ruler may well have aristocratic blood, but will not be an aristocrat in any social or cultural way; he will not be a preserver or defender of ancestral customs and laws, etc.

## CHAPTER THREE: COVERT TEACHING OF TYRANNY IN PLATONIC POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

*I. Introduction: Concealment of Association Between Tyranny and Philosophy in Plato and the Meaning of "Political Philosophy"—*

In this chapter I seek to show that Plato himself makes the case that philosophy and tyranny are fundamentally connected, or that the preconditions necessary for philosophy to exist and perpetuate itself are also the preconditions for tyranny. The preservation of philosophy and training of philosophers necessarily risks also the training for tyranny and the production of a tyrant. The philosopher and the tyrant are kindred *types*: the same type, the same youth, who uniquely becomes a philosopher also may become a tyrant.

Provisionally this may actually be described as the position of the character Callicles from Plato's *Gorgias.* The innovation here made in the reading of Plato is that Plato is shown to agree with Callicles at least insofar as the fundamental orientation toward the city is concerned. A question remains, as we will see, regarding the extent to which Plato refines and spiritualizes Callicles' brutal political teaching, or the extent to which Plato merely *prettifies* this teaching by covering it up and reframing it for "political presentation" with much wiliness. But before this may be decided, much of this chapter is a thinking-through of Callicles' position in

the *Gorgias*—Callicles being, as Strauss himself points out, a crucial source for Nietzsche's understanding of classical political philosophy.[1]

Accordingly in what follows, especially in the introduction, Callicles' "teaching" will be presented and summarized in a terse and matter-of-fact way. There is much in this view that is frightening and even abhorrent to us, especially when it is thought through to its "biological" foundations; nevertheless, for the purposes of understanding, this view must here be presented before the full "Platonic" revision or answer to it can be considered. The conclusion reached in this chapter is that in the final analysis Plato himself, at least politically is close, uncomfortably close perhaps, to the Calliclean position.

Since it is the same type of man who is to become either tyrant or philosopher, it turns out then that, according to Callicles, this type in the final analysis is the thing: in this reading the salvation and training of this biological type that provides "raw material" for both the philosopher and the tyrant is Plato's fundamental political concern. The production—the *breeding*—and training or protection of this biological specimen—the production of genius—is the original and fundamental function of political philosophy on one hand, and of tyranny on the other. Philosophy and tyranny are alternative methods to "preserve nature" or "save nature." These might be called "emergency medical measures" or maybe, in jest, but not inaccurately, "environmental protection measures." Philosophy and tyranny are means of carving out, within the life of the city, "game preserves" for the preservation of nature: the ancient aristocratic breeding project now unbound from

[1] Strauss IPP 116, note 9, where Nietzsche's sympathy for "Callicles" is discussed.

the identity of any historical class or tribe and made abstract, is preserved by political philosophy as a kind of fossil.

These are strange claims to make about Plato and about the meaning of political philosophy, and might appear especially perverse in light of Plato's well-known attack on tyranny in *Republic* and in the *Gorgias*. Nevertheless a quite strong case can be made from Plato's own writings that this is his meaning, and it is from the *Gorgias* itself, where Socrates moralizes so against tyranny and for "justice," that we can draw out the strongest evidence. But if Plato really did believe such things, he couldn't have said any of this openly or directly. And so the case to be made in this chapter will be indirect, and will rely on a reading of Plato as rhetoric. That is to say, Plato conceals such views, and often conceals them under opposite views: he conceals, for example, the fundamental kinship between philosophy and tyranny under a most vehement attack on tyranny. This Platonic rhetoric is itself, quite literally, "political philosophy": it is philosophy not only as investigation, but as spiritual warfare, presented with the intention of justifying and defending the place of the philosopher in the city, with presenting philosophy as a good citizen, with preserving philosophy within the confines of the *polis* and keeping it safe from physical harm and from corruption.

This view of political philosophy and its relationship to rhetoric will no doubt be familiar to the reader: it is almost a commonplace, in the wake of the revival of classical political philosophy by Leo Strauss and by his school, that political philosophy in its beginnings is not just the philosophical study of politics, but also philosophy itself *become political.* That is, political philosophy is philosophy aware

of its position in the city and therefore aware of the dangers it faces—aware of its need for self-preservation. The drive for self-preservation on the part of philosophers and their friends was the result of persistent persecution. Such persecution began at some point—at least as early as Anaxagoras—but intensified with Socrates' execution, and was carried out primarily by democratic regimes. Philosophy, in the beginning the "study of the things in the heavens and under the earth," was therefore forced to orient itself away from natural science and toward social life and in particular toward apologetics, a defense of philosophy as socially harmless or even beneficial in the face of persistent claims that it is harmful or dangerous. This apologetic and rhetorical project may be seen as one provisional definition of "political philosophy." This is philosophy oriented toward the *polis,* justifying its position in the *polis,* philosophy with a "politic" face. The study of political philosophy therefore makes special demands on the reader: he must read it *also,* if not primarily, as rhetoric, and therefore read between the lines, with special attention to means of concealment and dissimulation.

This view of political philosophy at least in its broad outlines will be adhered to in this chapter; and I agree with this means of reading philosophy also as rhetoric, with special attention to its arts of dissimulation and of speaking to multiple audiences at the same time. The only thing I add is that the apologetic project in question was especially directed toward disproving the notion, held by the people at the time, that philosophy or philosophers encouraged violent suppression of the democracy, and specifically *that philosophy encouraged tyranny,* or that it trained tyrants. It is precisely in trying to defend philosophy against this charge that Plato

reveals, on closer reading, just how true it is. Plato's "exoteric" project of defense and apology for philosophy was successful.[2] In his rhetorical success, however, he concealed some rather dark truths about the matter. Political philosophy in this sense is, as we will see, an alternative or substitute to the physical force and violence of actual tyranny, but, according to Callicles, intended to achieve the same purpose: the preservation of nature.

This view of Plato's apologetic project or of the purpose of "political" philosophy is a bit different from the one usually presented by students of Leo Strauss who have focused on the matter.[3] It may therefore be good to present here the case usually made about why a defense of philosophy was necessary and about the intention of Plato's apologetics. According to the somewhat better-known view, philosophy was under attack because in studying "the things in the heavens and under the earth" according to nature and reason, it undermined the conventional or traditional myths and stories about such things, and thereby destroyed the piety and religious faith that necessarily is the foundation of every state, and certainly of every ancient state.

So philosophy is said to be dangerous because by considering the things in the heavens and under the earth according to the standard of nature, it lessens belief in the divinities that are understood, according to the particular tradition in

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[2] Strauss wonders whether it was not "too successful"; OT 207

[3] I remain agnostic, for now, on whether Strauss himself would have agreed with any of the view presented in this chapter and thesis. This is intended to be an alternative reading of Platonic political philosophy—read, as it were, from the point of view of Nietzschean-Calliclean sympathies, which Strauss himself connects.

question, to be the sources of the political community and of the right way of life. Greek wisdom, philosophy in the famous words of Halevi, bears flowers but no fruit.[4] It speculates beautifully on natural and political matters, but it throws everything important into doubt and confusion. It may make elegant speculative theories but cannot therefore support a right way of life or a determined action. But practical life or right action requires firm conviction in settled and unquestioned principles.[5] A community cannot abide for long, at least not in a healthy way, if its founding principles are always publicly in question, and it is the character of philosophy to throw all fundamental principles in question. According to this view, philosophy is dangerous because it plants doubts in the hearts of men, perhaps the most able men in the community, regarding their way of life. It lessens attachment to the particular way of life of the political community, and may become a cause of apathy if not of outright treason. For this reason "philosophy" and "philosopher" became terms of abuse in the world of medieval Islam, of Judaism, and of Orthodox Christianity, as is well known.[6]

Two observations should now be made regarding this well-known case for why philosophy had to embark on a project of self-defense, apology, or had to "enter politics." First of all, while the allegations just repeated certainly constitute the core of the case against philosophy in medieval times in e.g., Cordoba, it is not clear that Greek religion or "theology" had the same orientation as Muslim or Jewish theology

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[4] From the poem beginning *Devarekha be-Mor Over Rekuhim*

[5] See Rousseau at *Social Contract* IV.8 repeating that there has never been a state without a religious foundation.

[6] See for example Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins* Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2001, p. 39, where Hasan-i Sabbah, the founder of the Persian branch of the sect talks about his conversion: "...it never entered my mind that truth should be sought outside Islam. I thought that the doctrines of the Ismailis were philosophy [a term of abuse among the pious], and the ruler of Egypt a philosophizer.'"

or that it felt itself under the same kind of specific threat. This is not to say that the Greeks were atheists, or that they were more "relaxed" about religion, or that their states required religious foundation any less than medieval Jewish or Muslim states, but rather that the political expression of Greek religion was considerably different. This is because although something akin to "revelation" did exist in the Greek world—for sure prophecy and oracles existed, functioned, and often had political purpose—nevertheless the character of such revelation was not legalistic in the same way that Jewish and Muslim revelation is. Orthodox Muslim and Jewish life require an adherence to a body of law that is revealed. Such law guides practice day to day and maybe minute to minute. Now, *nomos* in Greek life, law, custom, convention—the same word for all three—was likewise revealed or said to have its ultimate origin in divine ordinance, and similarly regulated all aspects of day to day life. Nevertheless, there is a *considerably* different way in which Greek (or Roman) *nomos* commands and medieval Talmudic or Koranic law commands. This difference may be intuited from the fact that the Greeks not only never had "priestly" rule but never had any such thing as "rule by judges," i.e., rule by legal interpreters of a revealed body of divine law. This form of rule—the rule by the *shofet* in Biblical times (*sopet* for the Carthagianians and Phoenicians), or rabbinical or clerical authority in medieval Jewish and Muslim societies—never existed in Greece or in Rome. That philosophy was held to be a danger in both times, that it was felt that philosophy somehow undermined or attacked the life of the city is certainly true. But the *specific threat* from philosophy was in these two cases maybe felt to be quite different.

That is, while the danger that philosophy presents to the city or to life was, in the Muslim or Jewish model, held to be that it engenders a kind of *anomie,* inactivity, or inability to sustain the faith and reverence required to fulfill daily commandments and therefore sustain right practice, by contrast in the Greek case philosophy was held to be dangerous because it taught *dangerous activity* and lawless violence.

Consider for a moment Aristophanes' *Clouds.* This text is often used as a stock example in the case for why the ancient city had contempt for philosophy. There is some superficial similarity to the case said to have been made by medieval Jewish and Muslim theology. Indeed we do see Socrates and his students idling about, studying useless theoretical inanities—

SOCRATES: So think about it—
if your small gut can make a fart like that,
why can't the air, which goes on for ever,
produce tremendous thunder. Then there's this—
consider how alike these phrases sound,
"thunder clap" and "fart and crap."[7]

And in general the philosopher is shown as ineffectual and ridiculous. In the famous "debate" between the Superior and Inferior Arguments the latter, representing the new tribe of the sophist and the philosopher, is rather shown to be destructive of "principles of right action" in a sense. The product of the sophist's

[7] Aristophanes *Clouds* 390-400

education is depicted as physically and morally lame, as opposed to the vigorous and vital student of the superior argument. But the final result of Socrates' "educational" project is not passivity, but anarchic and destructive violence: there is a debate about the beating of parents followed by a mob uprising and arson against Socrates' own school. One is reminded possibly, and in this case half-anachronistically, of Alcibiades, also Socrates' student, and his involvement in the destruction of the herms and the profanation of the Eleusinian mysteries, events that the people of Athens took to be precursors to a plot for the violent suppression of democracy. Not that philosophy teaches ineffectual passive nihilism and *anomie* then, but that it is supremely dangerous because it makes young men lawless and violent, and possibly antidemocratic and tyrannical: *this* seems to have been the concern about philosophy. A casual remark in Aeschines' *Against Timarchus,* uttered during a court trial in the mid-fourth century, at least fifty years after Socrates' execution, and uttered with the casual expectation that the audience is in agreement, makes clear what the tradition was among the people regarding "the danger of philosophy":

**...You put to death Socrates the sophist, fellow citizens, because he was shown to have been the teacher of Critias, one of the Thirty [Tyrants] who put down the democracy...**[8]

[8] Aeschines *Against Timarchus* 173

## *II. The Defense of Philosophy Against the Charge of Tyranny in the* Gorgias—[9]

### *a) An Introduction to the* Gorgias *and Callicles' Radical Antinomianism*

Both Plato and Xenophon are concerned to show that Socrates did not teach tyranny. The very fact that they both devote so much energy to refuting this charge supports the case that this was the main accusation, or at least the most fatal accusation against philosophy and against the Socratic school in particular. Some shorter examples of this effort include Xenophon's *Apology* and his *Memorabilia,* as well as certain passages in Plato's *Apology;* in these the authors attempt to show not only that Socrates in no way taught young men to be tyrannical, but that in fact he did not teach anything. Actually Xenophon's and Plato's arguments in these works are dubious, evasive, and weak and never establish the case that Socrates did not teach and that he did not teach tyranny; these arguments, being so obviously weak and even approaching the ridiculous, call into question the sincerity of their apologetics.[10] But *the* chief text in which Socrates is apparently defended from a charge that he could have ever taught tyranny or "injustice" of any kind is the *Gorgias.* And it is in precisely in the *Gorgias* where the deep and fundamental connection between tyranny and philosophy comes to light in Plato's work.

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[9] All unspecified citations in this section, and in this chapter, refer to line number from *Gorgias;* these will be put in brackets within the text. The translation used for context is the W.R.M. Lamb 1967 edition, see bibliography; but I have considerably changed this translation in many cases.

[10] Maybe the best known and most ridiculous argument is Socrates' claim in Plato's *Apology* that he would never have corrupted his own students because this means he would have turned them into criminals who might have ended up harming him. Xenophon's defense as well, in particular that Socrates "never taught" anyone is internally contradictory. For an adequate discussion of these examples and of the (apparently deliberate) inadequacy of Xenophon's arguments consult Donald Morrison's "Xenophon's Socrates as a Teacher," pgs. 181-208 but also especially pgs. 154-8 in *The Socratic Movement,* Paul A. Vander Waerdt, Cornell 1994

The *Gorgias* is a strange dialogue. It is roughly divided into three parts in which Socrates in turn argues with the orator Gorgias of Leontini, and then with his students Polus and Callicles, only the latter of whom is an Athenian. Ostensibly about the meaning of rhetoric, the dialogue veers off, for no obvious reason, into a discussion on what might be called "moral philosophy" and then erupts into the passionate and modern-sounding speeches of Callicles. This radical character is almost unique in Plato; more eloquent and more incisive than the "parallel" might-makes-right advocate Thrasymachus from *Republic,* Callicles appears to teach the "right by nature" of the stronger to rule over the weaker. And he appears to attack Socrates and philosophy itself in a new and radical way. The traditional "Christian" interpretation of the *Gorgias*—in which the moral philosophy of the text is seen as a prefiguration of the moral teaching of Christianity, or as progress toward a more humane modernity—and which appears also to be supported by liberal readers of Plato such as Karl Popper, seems to be that the *Gorgias* represents a landmark "moment" in the "progress of morality" since in the middle section—Socrates' argument with Polus—"for the first time" the case is made that it is better to allow harm to come to oneself than to inflict harm on others.[11] Others have noticed by contrast that Callicles' speeches stand out in all of Plato's opus for their intensity and passion and vividness, and that this indicates that Plato must have shared some special personal kinship with this radical character of the *Gorgias.* These latter agree with my interpretation that follows below insofar as they recognize the speeches

[11] Karl Popper *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Princeton 2013 p. 100 where the *Gorgias* is described as having a moral teaching that is both "individualistic" and "altruistic" and that is similar to Christian moral teaching.

and character of Callicles (and not Polus or the "moral philosophy" section) to be central to Plato's meaning in the *Gorgias*. But they disagree with my presentation insofar as in the end they revert to the same conclusion as the traditional interpretation: Callicles' "teaching," for all the "temptation" it must have held for a "young" Plato, is nevertheless evil or vulgar and is "refuted" by Socrates, who, standing in for Plato, makes the case for morality and for justice and against tyranny.[12]

My own case is rather different: I aim to investigate the possibility that Callicles' speeches are in fact Plato's own teaching; that Plato agrees with Callicles on all the *substantial* problems or on ends, but disagrees only so far as strategy and means are concerned. Plato in no way can avow such an agreement in the open. The means by which he shows his covert meaning is, first of all, of course, through Callicles' own speeches (and to some extent through allusions to other Platonic dialogues), through the dramatic setting of the dialogue, and especially through Socrates' replies to Callicles. Socrates' replies to Callicles can be classified in two categories. These replies are either terribly inadequate and illogical, and de facto leave the superior argument to Callicles, or, when they are not, they do not contradict but rather *radicalize* and double-up on Callicles. In other words, when Socrates effectively "refutes" Callicles, this is only because he *out-Callicles* Callicles. In the *Gorgias* we see the aristocratic standard of nature, Pindar's teaching from the

[12] E.R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1959, especially pages 12-14 in which Plato's apparent attraction to and even likeness to Callicles is posited; and it is supposed that Callicles might represent a Plato that Socrates had not gotten to. Now, however, it should be added that even if in the final analysis this is the case and if this is Plato's *final* opinion about Callicles, it by no means implies that Callicles' political orientation toward the city is as such rejected by Plato.

previous chapter, the "teaching of Cheiron," but here made abstract, radicalized. And at this point of abstraction is revealed the covert kinship between the tyrant and the philosopher, always suspected by the people. In the *Gorgias* we have, I argue, the perfect moment of "Platonic political philosophy": the moment when the philosopher is both forced to become political as a matter of self-defense, and the moment when, in the Straussian sense now, philosophy becomes "political," when it begins to put on a mask and to become a rhetorical project of apologetics intended to portray the philosopher as a man of "justice" and a "good citizen."

Let us begin then with what is exciting and vivid before we move to a closer consideration of the *Gorgias* as a whole: Callicles' frank, passionate, and radical first speech culminates in the following dramatic passage,

> For by what manner of right did Xerxes march against Greece, or his father against Scythia? Or take the countless other cases of the sort that one might mention. Why, surely these men follow nature—the nature of right—in acting thus; yes, on my soul, and follow the law of nature[*nomos phuseos*]--though not that, I dare say, which is made by us; we mold the best and strongest amongst us, taking them from their infancy like young lions, and utterly enthrall them by our spells and witchcraft, telling them the while that they must have but their equal share, and that this is what is fair and just. But, I fancy, when some man [*aner*] arises with enough nature [*hikanen phusin*], he shakes off all that we have taught him, bursts his bonds, and breaks free; he tramples underfoot our codes and juggleries, our charms and "laws," which are all against nature; our slave rises in revolt and shows himself [*epanastas anephane*] our master, and there shines [*exelampse*] out the full light of the right by nature [*tes phuseos dikaion*]. [483e-4b]

The reader will be reminded in Callicles' speech immediately of the numerous parallels to the words and ideas of Pindar.[13] A man—not *anthropos,* but

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[13] The reference to the lion cub is an especially dramatic touch if we should see the following passage from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 720-35, to which Callicles is *also* possibly alluding:

> So a man once raised a lion cub
> in his own home. The beast
> lacked milk but craved its mother's teat.
> In early life the cub was gentle.
> Children loved it, and it brought
> the old men great delight.

*aner,* a word pregnant with meaning—with "enough nature" [*hikanen phusin*][14] arises in revolt out of the primordial and constraining and homogenized darkness of *nomos* to manifest [*anephane*] himself as a master: in this event shines out the right by nature, shines out [*exelampse*] the truth as opposed to the lies of the many. In this passage four such "Pindaric" words follow one upon another in quick succession: *anephane, exelampse, endeiknusthai, tekmairomai,*[15] all invoking images of a vivid truth that *arises* into the light and manifests itself *out* of something. *Convention* is

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They gave it many things
and clasped it in their arms,
as if it were a nursing child.
Its fiery eyes fixed on the hands
that fed it, the creature fawned,
a slave to appetite.

But with time the creature grew
and its character showed—
the one its parents gave it.
So it paid back those who reared it,
preparing a meal in gratitude,
an unholy slaughter of the flocks,
house awash with blood,
while those who lived inside the home
were powerless against the pain,
against the massive carnage.
By god's will they'd brought up
a priest of doom in their own house.

The image of the lion as irrepressible, ineducable nature, as character that, on reaching age, shows itself—"the one its parents gave it"—and that results in a bloodbath of violence and doom for the household, for everyday life and convention: an especially important image for Callicles, as we are about to see.

[14] Often translated as "sufficient strength" and said to be a coinage of "Callicles," that is, of Plato. But that seems unlikely, given the allusion to Pindar that follows. While Pindar himself never used this particular combination of words, the idea of "enough nature" was already expressed in Pindar in several different ways as was shown in the previous chapter.

[15] Literally: "up-manifests," "out-shines," "in-shows," and the last, *tekmairomai,* is quoted directly from Pindar and is the verb form of *tekmar,* i.e., to give a visible outward, manifest *sign,* see discussion in previous chapter; the explicit connection that Plato draws between Callicles and Pindar should, in my opinion, incline one against Seth Benardete's claim that Callicles is in some way "the voice of Athenian imperial democracy." See Benardete *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato's Gorgias and Phaedrus* U. Chicago 2009, pgs. 8 and 75, where the impress of Athenian imperialism on Callicles is argued for. But Callicles is not the voice of any democracy or democratic sentiment at all, but of Pindar's aristocratic orientation radicalized: of aristocratic radicalism. Otherwise, my presentation in this chapter owes much to Benardete's profound reading of both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus.*

chatter and darkness and false speech over against which the bare biological fact of superior breeding—the possession of "enough nature"—manifests itself with force as the only vivid truth; even the image of the lion in this context must be Pindaric, although the sinister suggestion here made that convention can smother and suppress nature, particularly the nature of a lion, does not really exist in Pindar. Also seemingly unprecedented is the phrase "law of nature," [*nomos phuseos*] a commonplace in our time, but a seeming contradiction in terms during pre-Platonic or pre-Socratic antiquity. This is, as far as is known, the first instance of this phrase in history. It is in any case without doubt that Plato is having Callicles invoke Pindar in this speech and particularly even in this phrase of "the law of nature," especially since Callicles actually quotes Pindar in the very next line of his speech:

> And it seems to me that Pindar adds his evidence to what I say, in the ode where he says—
> "Law the sovereign of all, Mortals and immortals, "
> which, so he continues,—
> "Carries all with highest hand, Justifying the utmost force: in proof I take The deeds of Hercules, for unpurchased "
> —the words are something like that—I do not know the poem well—but it tells how he drove off the cows as neither a purchase nor a gift from Geryones; taking it as a natural right that cows or any other possessions of the inferior and weaker should all belong to the superior and stronger. [484b-c]

The "law" in this quotation, which is "the king of all mortals and immortals," should not be interpreted in the traditional meaning of *nomos,* that is, convention as we have seen it so far, but as "the law of nature" that Callicles had just mentioned before, to which both mortals and immortals are subject.[16] Callicles does appear, on

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[16] There is a great deal of scholarship about Callicles' quotation of Pindar, most of which is quite interesting, but very technical and not directly relevant to my argument here. My interpretation here, that is, the case that *nomos* as quoted refers not to convention or law in the traditional sense but to "the law of Zeus" or, more correctly in my opinion, the "law of nature," is made by Marian Demos in "Callicles' Quotation of Pindar in the *Gorgias," Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 1994 pp. 85-107 who also quotes Harold Lloyd-Jones "Pindar fr. 169" 1972, and Marcello Gigante *Nomos Basileus* (1956) who make a similar argument; regarding this quotation of Pindar see also Demos' interesting reference to Libanius' claim that at Socrates' trial his prosecutor Anytus *accused Socrates of using this very line from Pindar to teach the youth of the city lawlessness and violence.* There is a debate as to

first sight during his first dramatic speech, to be "radicalizing" the teaching of Pindar with an explicit justification of the tyranny of the man of superior nature. The full light of the "right by nature" [*phuseos dikaion*] shines out when the man of enough nature breaks free of convention and becomes our master [*despotes*].

*b) Structure of* Gorgias *and Callicles' Introduction of the Standard of Nature; Escape from Convention—*

Let us step away from Pindar for a moment and consider Callicles' claims in the speech quoted above more closely. And therefore we must consider also Callicles' role in the *Gorgias* as a whole. If we should pay close attention to Callicles' words in the passage above it will become clear that there is one and only one thing that concerns him beyond everything else: liberation from *nomos* or convention. A more detailed consideration of his two speeches and of their position in the *Gorgias* confirms the impression drawn from the climax of his presentation. Callicles is the crucial figure in the *Gorgias,* and the issue that drives him is the crucial issue of the dialogue.

Callicles' speeches are central to the dialogue in every way. Callicles' first speech, 482c-486d, is in the very physical center of the *Gorgias;* and it is the first long speech in the dialogue by a character other than Socrates. It introduces a new

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Libanius' sources for this claim, but, regardless of whether such an accusation was actually brought up at Socrates' trial, it is most significant that there existed a tradition that it *had* been brought up, a tradition that survived as late as Libanius. Of course here in the *Gorgias* we see Plato show Callicles, the supposed "anti-Socrates," invoke this radical poem, and Socrates instead is presented as the pious defender of conventional justice, turning the rumor about Socrates on its head.

competitor in the dialogue, Callicles, who for the remainder of the text, the whole second half, will remain Socrates' *only* competitor—before 482c there had been frequent changes in speakers.[17] Further there is something substantially peculiar about the nature of Callicles' speeches. Callicles not only now but also later at 491e-492c ignores what had been a repeated insistence of Socrates' since the very beginning of the dialogue, namely that his interlocutors avoid long speeches. [449b] Socrates, however, does not chide his fellow Athenian interlocutor for speaking at length, as he did Gorgias and Polus earlier, but on the contrary repeatedly praises his freedom of speech or frankness, [*parrhesia*] that for which Athens is most famous. [461e] Another peculiarity is that Callicles is not only literally the central speaker but that he also opens the dialogue *Gorgias* (with the words "of war and battle," addressed to Socrates) and his name, in the vocative *O Kallikleis,* closes the dialogue. Furthermore, again, Socrates considers him his best opponent, superior to Gorgias and Polus. Callicles, as Socrates' first, central, last, and best opponent is *the* key to understanding the *Gorgias;* the moral argument that starts with Polus, for which this dialogue is most famous—that doing wrong is worse that suffering it—is not only secondary to understanding the meaning of this text, but completely misleading. It is, as I will show later, a rather transparent rhetorical device. The central issue is not moral as such, but specifically political.

Two things, one general and one particular, impel Callicles to enter the argument in the way that he does. Or, we could call one impetus necessary to the course of the argument, and the second impetus a peculiar and particular

[17] For example at 449a, 461b, 463e, 466a, etc.; after Callicles enters, Gorgias only interrupts twice, and then not substantially.

provocation that Socrates makes to Callicles *ad hominem,* and which guides the dialogue in an unexpected direction. Callicles' speech is motivated in *general* by an attempt to take up the argument after the failures of Gorgias [449a-461b] and Polus [461b-481b]. In his argument with Socrates, Gorgias failed because he was ashamed to admit that he cannot teach justice. Polus then failed because he was ashamed to say that suffering wrong is more shameful than doing it. In other words, Socrates' opponents keep failing because of their shame [*aiskhune*], a judgment in which Socrates and Callicles agree, and to which Gorgias and Polus, who are present, do not object. Shame, indeed, will turn out to be crucial to understanding the rhetorical structure of the *Gorgias.*

Callicles' speech, however, is motivated in *particular* by Socrates' provocation at 481d, an unusual, playful "introductory provocation" in the *Gorgias.*[18] The longer second half of Callicles' first speech contains a rather unusual attack on philosophy, to which I referred briefly above, and which we will consider in more detail below. The form of Callicles' response—the fact that he "needs" to attack the philosophical life in the second half of his speech—is then understandable in terms of Socrates' provocation, which contrasted the philosophical life of Socrates with the political life of Callicles. But it is not so easy to understand why Socrates chose to make this provocation. The direction the dialogue takes from this point may be called peculiar because there are no external substantial signs that the argument necessarily had to proceed to a consideration of the difference between the

[18] Socrates does not make such an introductory provocation, complete with biographical reflections on his interlocutor, and with an illustration of his specific opposition to the interlocutor, anywhere else in the *Gorgias* when speakers changed or when new speakers were introduced.

philosophical and the political life. At this point it is also relevant to note that although Callicles attacks the philosophic life in a certain sense, *he nowhere repeats or explicitly agrees with the distinction Socrates makes between the philosophic and political lives.*

A most revealing statement occurs at the very beginning of Callicles' speech. He says that, "you are such, O Socrates, as to lead the conversation to the demagogic[19] and base things—when *asserting* you are pursuing the truth—to the things that are not noble by nature, but by convention." [482e] Callicles repeats this same idea later in his second speech, when he uses the same expression again: "the truth, O Socrates, that you *assert* [fancy] to be pursuing..."[20] [492c] This idea is a repetition of the opposition between truth [*aletheia*] and nature on one hand and the common establishments [*sunthemata*] on the other. These statements show that for Callicles shame [*aiskhune*], the base things [*aiskhra*], the *demos,* and convention stand together on one side while on the other we have truth, nature, and the noble things. Gorgias and Polus failed because Socrates shamed them, that is, he mired them in the conventional notions that are somehow allied with shame. Callicles, as both he and Socrates keep repeating, admirably lacks shame, and possesses frankness in the highest degree.

The argument that Callicles uses at the beginning of his speech already reveals much not only about himself but also about the true nature of his battle with

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[19] *Demegorika,* literally "*demos-speaking*" or "things publicly addressed to the *demos*"
[20] *phaskon ten aletheian diokein* in the first case and *tei aletheiai, O Sokrates, hen pheis su diokein* in the second. The use of *phanai* instead of *legein* in these cases is already significant because Callicles is already accusing Socrates of being in an assertive, fanciful, imaginative, i.e., rhetorical mode.

Socrates. For Callicles does not claim that Socrates is himself beholden to *nomos,*[21] but that he uses *nomos* to his advantage in argument, just as he uses *phusis* when it suits him. [482d-e] But a man who knows how to use these things in argument and to confuse others about them surely knows the distinction between the two; he may even be called a master of this distinction. It is for this reason that Callicles claims Socrates speaks to the *demos* [*demegorein*] when he argues against Gorgias and Polus so successfully. But the very fact that Callicles concedes that Socrates won against two extremely skilled orators by speaking not things he believes to be the truth, but by "speaking to the people," that is, by using rhetoric, already invalidates Callicles' and Polus' repeated claims that Socrates would not know how to defend himself in public by using rhetoric. [486a-c, 469-70, etc.] Callicles knows Socrates is no fool. If in a "moral" debate the two opponents are set on accusing each other of being demagogues, [481d-e, 482e, 492c, etc.] we have every right to suspect that their disagreement has to do with something other than what appears in the open.

Leaving this question aside for a moment, I continue with a clarification of Callicles' main concern. Callicles reaches the dramatic and radical conclusion that the right by nature only shines out when convention is suppressed and violently broken. According to Callicles, nature does not love to hide, but it is systematically hidden by convention.[22] It is there, known and powerful, but is covered up by the somehow related forces of *nomos, demos,* and shame [*aiskhune*]. The means by

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[21] I will use *nomos* and "convention" interchangeably, and also *phusis* and "nature."

[22] Callicles' notion of the manifestness or, to use an inappropriately Heideggerian expression, the unconcealedness of truth, is reflected in claims such as the following. He says that nature herself *shows* [*apophainei*] that the right or just [*dikaion*] is the advantage of the stronger over the weaker [483c9-d2]; that *dikaion* has been decided to *consist* [*kekritai*] in the rule and advantage of the stronger over the weaker [483d5]; that this *is clear* from many instances in the world [*deloi...;* 483d2]; that the justice of nature *shines out* in certain situations [484b], or that it simply *is* [484c].

which convention upsets and covers up what is right by nature is the crucial part of Callicles' speech. It is his main point of interest, the dramatic and emotional peak of his presentation, and occupies the central and longer part of his speech. Callicles' concern for liberation from convention is the crux, so much so that by 484b Callicles makes the amazing claim that truth itself and the just by nature will shine out *only* in the escape or revolt from convention, and in the trampling of it. The just by nature therefore, the truth about nature, although observed from many occurrences in nature [483d5], is not the default case in nature, but depends on a revolt against convention.

How then does convention suppress the natural way? This question, and *not* the clarification of what would be the best life or "the advantage of the stronger," is what takes up most of Callicles' time and passionate anger. It is the tyranny of convention over superior human specimens that most concerns Callicles. Now, to start with, it is interesting that absent from his description of suppression by *nomos* is the mention of any physical force. The issue is slightly confused for us because in Greek, the word *nomos* stands not only for convention, but also for way, positive law, specific custom, even specific musical melodies. We are accustomed to think of political order, control, or suppression as consisting in positive law enforced by physical power or threat. Indeed earlier Polus had described exclusively *physical* threats against the tyrannical man who seeks to usurp the polity. [473c5] In that passage Polus used the word *diaphugon,* "running away through," or "escaping," in the sense of the tyrant's escaping *physical* punishments. But when Callicles describes the way the superior man escapes enslavement from *nomos* and becomes

tyrant or despot[23] with the same word, *diaphugon,* he never mentions anything about escaping physical punishment. What then does the superior man escape? He escapes our "enslaving *speaking"* [*katadoulometha legontes,* 484a]. Just as earlier not lack of knowledge, but lack of daring, stood in the way of the manifestness of nature or truth, so now not lack of physical power or knowledge, but lack of "a sufficient nature" [484a] stands in the way of the shining out of the just by nature—the superior man becoming a despot. This is Callicles' surprising and radical conclusion: *nomos* controls not by physical power, but by a kind of speaking or "education."[24]

The *nomos,* or human convention, is "set up" by "us" against the just by nature, or even, Callicles boldly announces, against the *nomos* or way of nature. [483e] In describing how our *nomos* is set up, Callicles does not refer to any physical act, but only to *forming* or "educating" men. He uses the word *plattein,* "to form" or "to mould," the same word that Plato uses in the *Republic,* and elsewhere, when describing the way *nomoi* form the opinions and souls of the young citizens.[25] It is not therefore just the positive laws, *hoi nomoi,* that enforce convention, but our moulding the strong from childhood [*plattontes...ek neon*] a kind of education achieved through *speaking.* For at 483b-c, the positive laws, *nomoi,* are paired together with praises [*epainoi*] and blames [*psogoi*]; and at 484a5 the *nomoi* are paired with written codes or formulas [*grammata*], trickeries [*manganeumata*] and incantations [*epoides*]. The laws, *hoi nomoi,* are only mere tools of convention, *nomos,* as such. The more general *nomos,* or convention in general, consists of many

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[23] [*despotes...ho doulos,* 484a6]
[24] See also 492c7: the covenants or common establishments [*sunthemata*] are likened to "foolish speaking" [*phluaria*]
[25] See *Rep.* 377c3, *Tim.* 88c4, *Laws* 671c1; see Bloom "Interpretive Essay" 1991

other tools, all in speech. It is generally a ubiquitous regime of formative myths—Callicles uses words with magical connotations. *Nomos* depends on lies and fantasies, "all against nature" [484a] and therefore against truth. If this reminds us of the famous "noble lie" of Socrates at *Rep.* 414b, then we are on the right track to understanding Callicles' point—so long as we see there is nothing noble or worthwhile about the existing conventions in Callicles' opinion. But the mechanism *works* the same way: the *nomos works* through formative myths, through "witchcraft in speech"—Callicles uses here for bewitchment the word *goeteuein,* a word that occurs only rarely in Greek literature and mostly in Plato, and a word that Socrates uses several times at *Republic* 413 just before introducing the idea of the noble lie.[26]

Callicles is deeply concerned with the corruption of the superior men—the *erromenesteroi,* a peculiar word we will closely consider in due time—at the hands of *nomos:* he never speaks of how or if *nomos* forms or educates anyone else. This reading of Callicles' main speech is further supported by his statements during his second speech, from 491e to 492c. Pressed by Socrates to make his position more precise, Callicles expresses with great emphasis that the just and noble according to nature is equivalent to a man's living the correct or right way [*...orthos biosomenon,* 491e]. Within that speech, the conventions and, again, praises [*epainoi*] of men all are deceptions and mental obstacles to the superior living rightly. [492c] Praise and blame are the tools of *nomos* that Callicles mentions most frequently: as these have to do with the management of shame, this explains the close relationship Callicles

[26] Socrates uses the word here in connection with the mechanism by which opinions are changed or formed: bewitchment changes the opinions of men by deceiving or terrifying. Terrifying [*ekphobein*] is also a word Callicles uses in describing how the myths of the *nomos* corrupts the minds of the more superior men.

maintains between shame [*aiskhune*] and *nomos.* In conclusion, to repeat, the escape of the *erromenesteroi,* the healthy human specimens, from the enslaving grasp of convention is at once *the* emotional focus for Callicles' passion, as well as the substantial and dramatic crux of both his speeches. By contrast, his elucidation of what in fact the life of the *erromenesteroi* would be after their liberation is only briefly treated, and he remains unclear at best on that point. This is a lack of clarity Socrates will soon exploit, perhaps unfairly so.

Could it be that Callicles represents, in unvarnished form, the political doctrine of pre-Socratic philosophy? To understand the meaning of this question consider again the ubiquitous persecution of philosophy even before Socrates. The pre-Socratic philosophers were accused, probably correctly, of being atheists. They were in agreement regarding the conventional character of human notions of the good, and regarding also the conventional character of all human association in general.[27] Now it is this last claim, which, if made public, is extremely dangerous. Its danger is clear if we are able to understand that by making such a claim without positing the possibility of a city by nature, the pre-Socratics were essentially saying that all human cities are arbitrary associations without any conceivable power to bind its superior citizens. Discovering the fact that the city's customs and ways are merely conventional, a lover of truth would gladly retreat to the very rewarding

[27] Plato *Laws* 889d7-890d2 as compared to 890c1-5 and 967a7 ff., Aristotle *Metaphysics* 990a-b, as appears in the discussion of Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History,* "Origin of the Idea of Natural Right": "The crucial pre-Socratic text [on the right by nature] is the saying of Heraclitus, 'In God's view all things are fair [noble] and good and just, but men have made the supposition that some things are just and others are unjust.' The very distinction between just and unjust is merely a human supposition or human convention."

study of nature in private. A mental liberation from the notions of his city and a practical liberation from its political demands on his life is a prerequisite for such a philosopher, and such a liberation is indeed possible only with the insight that these notions and claims are merely conventions, common decisions and decrees of the fellow citizens without true binding power. Heraclitus' kingly self-sufficiency is the most famous example of this pre-Socratic attitude toward political life. But, a certain way of thinking goes, a Callicles will draw a rather different conclusion from this insight, from the distinction between nature and convention. The interest in knowledge or the love of truth certainly cannot be taught, while the insight that there is a distinction between nature and convention may arguably be very easily taught in the abstract. According to this way of thinking, this distinction is indeed necessary for the philosopher, who will retreat into Epicurean contemplation, living on the edge of the city as a harmless parasite, but will be most dangerous in the hands of men who seek power and do not wish to be encumbered by moral restraint in their careers. I would like to indicate why such a way of thinking is not correct. We have no reason to take the Epicurean at his word, without further testing, when he claims that his insight or hermitry is harmless, and that if it is invoked by criminals, then it is merely being abused. In fact the Calliclean option, or the pursuit of tyranny, *is itself a genuinely philosophical conclusion,* and, again, could be argued to be the pure and open political doctrine of pre-Socratic philosophy itself. It is not, I claim, merely the abuse of the name and methods of philosophy by cynical people who are only interested in political advantage to start with.

To see why this is so, and to try to tunnel into Callicles' mind for a moment, consider that the pre-Socratic insight has two closely related, perhaps initially inextricable components: that there is a nature that is the same everywhere; and that human association is arbitrary or based on chance and circumstance. If a talented, ambitious, and erotic young man hears this and understands all of this to be true, liberation from the city's ways becomes a necessity. To conform to the city's ways cannot be acceptable, because it has been agreed that the city as such consists only in the common decisions of the many. These common decisions lack all justification besides the word of the many, which is no justification at all. There is neither a legitimate divine claim to cleave to the city's ways—for the divine is merely a matter of convention—nor is there a natural reason to do so, because, again, according to pre-Socratic philosophy, there is no natural reason that men come together. In fact this possibility is hardly considered. There might be derivative expedient reasons to live as an obedient member of the community, but these clearly can only have binding power to those to whom it is actually expedient and useful to do so.

To say that all human association is conventional is, again, to say that man is not a political animal, that to be political is not in his nature, but that political communities have come about merely a matter of arbitrary decision or accidental circumstance. If he is not a political animal, then man is a private animal. If so, there must be only a secondary or derivative reason for people to have come together, to have formed particular conventions. This reason may be found, as the Epicureans from Lucretius to Hobbes would have it, most easily in the desire of the many to

protect themselves from the forces of nature, from oppression by stronger men; or it may have been just a matter of random historical processes that brought men together and "socialized" them, which is another common modern idea that derives from Epicurean thought.[28] In all these cases, the political community—*any* political community—loses all its claim to bind those who think they can follow their desires outside the city, for example by studying nature. But it also loses all claim to bind those who think they can actually take power by force. In fact, one may make a case, as Callicles indeed does, that the young man who could become a philosopher, i.e., who has insight into the primal philosophical distinction between nature and convention, not only has a right but even a *duty* to become tyrant. Such a duty may even be called properly philosophical, *literally guided by the love of truth.* Callicles reaches this conclusion in the following way.

Immediate slavery or possible freedom is in the balance. The question is deeply personal to Callicles: at 481c-2c Socrates has just provoked him in a deep way, deep not only because Socrates implicitly calls Callicles a demagogue, which to a man like Callicles must be very insulting; but also because in mentioning philosophy, Socrates plays on Callicles' very recent and very important concerns. Callicles is just embarking on a political career [515a] and has seriously considered in what way he should best live or best pursue his education in youth [487c-d]. His serious consideration of how far he should have pursued philosophy indicates that he had doubts about how he should live, or at least about how he should spend his youth: doubts that were only recently settled. These doubts had to do with the

[28] Compare, broadly, the genesis of human society in Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* with that of Lucretius' in *On the Nature of Things*

choice between two things: the philosophical and the political life. Callicles still enjoys philosophy and even Socrates. [458d] A dalliance in one's youth with philosophy does not yet make a philosopher; Callicles may be supposed to be just a sophist who uses philosophical insights for personal gain. But several facts must convince us that this is not the case.

First of all, the distinction between philosopher and sophist is not as clear as we would like to think, and it is only the tradition since Plato that provides for us a clear distinction between the two, a distinction probably based on rhetorical devices.[29] Second, again, it is Socrates and not Callicles who distinguishes clearly between the philosophical and political lives. Although Callicles attacks the political life, he nowhere says explicitly that he has chosen between the political and philosophical lives. Further and beyond this consideration is the fact that Callicles' engagement with philosophy is not merely casual and insubstantial. It is as a result of his embrace of *the* fundamental and indispensable philosophical insight that Callicles has chosen the life he has, and it is in the name of this insight that he earnestly, frankly, and passionately endorses the life he has chosen. There is no indication at all in the text that Callicles has from the start been merely a political and ambitious youth who cynically uses certain methods of the philosophers to forward his career. As much as we would like to believe this is the way of the sophist, Plato nowhere implies this is the case with Callicles, though it would have

[29] Socrates defends sophists against the attacks of gentlemen both in the *Gorgias* and especially *Euthydemus*. See the end of Strauss' essay on the *Euthydemus* at SPPP p. 89 where it is said, "Socrates was not the mortal enemy of the sophists nor were the sophists the mortal enemies of Socrates. According to Socrates, the greatest enemy of philosophy, the greatest sophist, is the political multitude (Republic 492a5-e6), i.e. the enactor of the Athenian laws."

been easy to do, and though it would have definitely given Socrates the clear superiority in argument. Plato's failure to provide us with such information is a clear sign that the argument concerns a deeper issue than the misuse of philosophy by crassly political men. Callicles' rejection of the philosophical life and pursuit of tyranny, is, I cannot repeat enough, a conclusion he has reached from serious philosophical reflection, perhaps too-earnest reflection. *Callicles is in fact a philosopher who has discovered that the radical philosophic insight must consist in a rejection of the anachoretic and private philosophical life. He is not the voice of the city or the political community, less still merely of a gentleman, an "Attic Junker." He is the voice of pre-Socratic philosophy become political.*

I offer the following speculative reconstruction of Callicles' "philosophical" reasoning in favor of the pursuit of tyranny. Callicles' chief concern is the salvation of the "better-turned-out" from corruption by the *nomos* and the liberation of such specimens from *nomos.* In this salvation and liberation is expressed at the very least the *precondition* for truth or the search for truth: but actually, I would claim, in this is expressed also truth itself. That is, the manifestation of truth in the world, "the shining out of the right by nature," the "law of nature," is the "better-turned-out" freeing himself from and trampling on convention or *nomos.* Truth or right express themselves in the preservation and emergence into the light of *phusis* or nature. In this context it is most significant that the word used by Callicles (and by Socrates) all along in their discussion for the "better-turned-out" is *erromenesteros,* a word with

biological connotations.[30] The preservation of the "superior breed" or biological specimen is the preservation of nature in the world and therefore the guarantee of the emergence of truth about the world. Callicles might say, "The natural, original activity of the *erromenesteros is* philosophy—it is what the *erromenesteros* gladly pursues in his childhood and youth—but it didn't work; it leads to men like Socrates being killed; it leads to the extinction of breeding and therefore of the knowledge of nature in the world; for nature and truth to preserve and *manifest* themselves the 'philosophers,' or rather the *erromenesteroi,* the men of 'sufficient nature' from whom the philosopher would under ideal circumstances organically emerge, must take power in the cities and grasp for a tyranny." It is the "spiritual tyranny"[31] of pre-Socratic philosophy become politically active under emergency conditions of persecution and turned into the *pursuit of actual tyranny.*

*According to Callicles* one may restate the relationship between philosophy and the *erromenesteros* in this way: the distinction between nature and convention is inextricably tied to the distinction between superior and inferior human natures. Convention only originates and consists in the common decisions of the inferior to protect themselves from the superior, and convention or myth and false speech is the *only* element that covers up nature and truth. It is the superior human specimens or the *erromenesteroi* who have the unique access to the distinction between nature and convention, and they only have this access in the best

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[30] Ultimately from *rhonnumi,* to have strength, might, to be in good health; the word, the same that Plato uses in the *Republic* (*sungeneia erromene,* emphasizing *inborn* might and health at *Rep.* 491c; at 491d he uses the word in relation to botanical [*phuton*] or animal [*zoon*] growth ) to describe the potential philosopher, is often otherwise used to indicate vigor, vigorous growth, vehemence.
[31] See Nietzsche *Human All Too Human* 261 "Tyrants of the Spirit," and the discussion of this passage in the following chapter.

circumstances; they are ever in danger of being corrupted, enslaved, smothered by *nomos*. It is the issue of the *erromenesteros* that is central in the *Gorgias*. The word *erromenesteros*[32] represents the raw natural element of superiority, as opposed to words such as *phronimos, kreitto, beltion,*[33] and so on, which all indicate a particular direction in which the native superiority has been trained. Callicles' definition of the superior as *erromenesteros is the only one that Socrates does not attack later.* The interest of the *erromenesteros* drives all of Callicles' speeches and explains his passion and the sense of immediate or impending doom in his words. It is critical to realize that Callicles believes Socrates himself is a man with "sufficient nature," or one of the superior. He refers to him repeatedly as "of noble nature," [485e] or "well-natured" [485d, 486b]; but he does this mainly in the context of stating that no matter how well-natured or superior a man is, the excessive practice of philosophy will corrupt [*diaphtheirein*] him and make him worse [486b].[34] A man who practices philosophy late into life will be kept in a state of permanent childhood—at least this is the main point of Callicles' discussion at 485a-c; in other words, the lion will not be able to break free.

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[32] The comparative of *erromenos,* the passive participle of *rhonnumi,* "to confirm, to make strong," usually used in the passive *erromai,* "to be strong, vigorous, etc."

[33] Greek abounds in different words to compare ways in which one man excels over another; the above three may be provisionally translated as "better, more prudent; better, stronger; better, more noble" etc.; but *erromenesteros,* the word that both Callicles uses in the *Gorgias,* and Socrates uses in the *Republic,* refers to the "raw material" for all this: to the end-product of an aristocratic breeding project that stands opposed to the native egalitarian conventions of the commons.

[34] This is of course the same word in the famous charge of the city against Socrates, as in Plato's and Xenophon's *Apology,* where the court's indictment is reproduced; its use by Callicles, however, only serves to emphasize the stark difference between the two meanings of corruption, the conventional meaning on one hand, the natural meaning of the other. Callicles uses the natural meaning of corruption, and this is precisely the unavoidable issue that binds the tyrant and the philosopher, as we will have the occasion to see in this study.

Now, the breaking free of the lion is for Callicles *the* manifestation of truth.[35] It is significant that in the model just sketched out, the primal truth is a manifestation of natural superiority in the world. Truth, nature, and nobility, all one and the same, are manifest for Callicles. By contrast speech is used for deception, speech belongs to convention, and truth is hidden only by the false and deceptive speech of convention. Convention, *shame,* [*aiskhune*] and the inferior many, are one and the same—they use deception in speech to cover up manifest truth. It is in this sense that in Callicles' speeches the escape from convention through the assertion of raw superior nature over the many is a philosophical act, for it literally expresses the love of truth, or even more literally, is the only genuine expression of truth, the only moment when truth is uncovered and "unforgotten." The love of the liberation of the *erromenesteros* is the love of truth, for this and only this is the manifestation of truth. For Callicles, Socrates' impending execution by a lower form of man, by a *mokhtheros* [486b-c] is the best example of how philosophy, which was born with the discovery of nature and thereby with the awakening of the superior human specimens, is completely unable to actually provide for their advantage, but works instead for their corruption, enslavement, and destruction. Paradoxically, it is not philosophy that is the liberation for the superior human natures even though philosophy is in some sense the "original" activity of such natures. It is only rhetoric or tyranny won through the art of rhetoric that can provide the means to liberation and defense for philosophers: philosophers merely practicing philosophy are thereby committing suicide, and the suicide of philosophy at the hands of the many

[35] See above, and compare 482e to 484b, before the Pindar quotation. Cf. 492c

or of convention is the covering-up of truth, quite literally. Philosophers must become rhetoricians and tyrants; this itself is, in a convoluted way, "philosophical activity." I will have more to say on the relationship between Callicles' philosophical nature and his pursuit of tyranny later; for now it is necessary to consider what Socrates has to say about Callicles' attack on conventional justice.[36]

*c) Socrates' bizarre replies to Callicles; the radicalization of Calliclean "political philosophy"—*

It is to be seen that Socrates in fact doesn't challenge any of Callicles' fundamental political orientation. Socrates merely shows that Callicles, in his youth, is naïve about politics—he confuses *nomos* with *politeia,* or rather misses the point that ultimately it is physical force and not speech that constitutes political society—and doesn't truly understand the key, the special kind of rhetoric or strategy that will really make philosophy, not only safe in the cities, but "rule in the cities." Callicles' frankness, his *parrhesia,* to which Socrates repeatedly refers throughout the *Gorgias,* is his shortcoming. Callicles is not sufficiently "de-civilized" enough, for he has not learned at the hands of a Cheiron in the woods—his teacher has been the urbane orator Gorgias, and not a "wild" man like Socrates, who is repeatedly called *agroikos*

[36] According to Thrasymachus in the *Republic* and, as we have seen, according to pre-Socratic philosophers or sophists generally, all right is conventional. Callicles claims that there is such a thing as natural right. He therefore already represents the philosophic teaching become political, or the birth of political philosophy. He is arguably the intermediate stage between the apolitical pre-Socratics and the Socratic moral philosophers. Or rather, he is pre-Socratic philosophy become political without actually possessing political acumen.

in this dialogue. He knows neither the lion nor the fox. He's accordingly too conventional—and believes too much in the power of words, and clumsily overt words at that. Socrates doesn't just believe in the power of words, but also of force. It was Socrates, not Callicles or Polus, who reminded both that the true power in the cities lies with he who *holds a hidden dagger.* [469d] So Socrates does disagree with Callicles; but it is a disagreement about tactics, and it is in any case not the disagreement of the pious moralist that the tradition has held Plato to be in this dialogue.

Now, Socrates' replies to Callicles in the *Gorgias* are weak and inadequate to the point of absurdity; they lack any power to convince anyone reading this text freshly and without an overbearing prejudice in favor of Socrates or in favor of conventional morality. Socrates in a sense wins the argument, since Callicles is reduced to silence after a certain point. But it is not clear if this victory is merely rhetorical, or even what "merely rhetorical" would mean in this case. It is not clear why Plato would have Socrates make the arguments he does or why Socrates would make these in the order that he does to this particular audience—an audience of orators seemingly unwilling to accept any of his premises.

Socrates' answers to Callicles' challenge are disjointed and winding. We should therefore keep several key points always in mind when we consider the labyrinthine path on which Socrates takes us, and by no means trust that he is doing what he says he is doing or what he appears to be doing. We should always keep in mind Callicles' specific claims and the nature of his main concern—and the fact that he doesn't agree with the distinction between the political and philosophical lives as

Socrates presents it. What Socrates *appears* to be doing is clear enough, and everyone who reads this text will at first agree with the traditional interpretations. Socrates seems to be doing with Callicles what he did earlier with Gorgias and Polus. He seems to be defending justice against the cynical and tyrannical attacks and sophistries of the rhetors. In his argument with Gorgias, Socrates introduced the question of justice at a point at which it was by no means necessary to do so to continue the discussion. Indeed, it was plainly rude on the part of Socrates to embarrass his interlocutor in this way.[37] In his discussion with Polus Socrates seems again to defend the cause of justice to the extreme against Polus' claims that the art of rhetoric supplies raw power to do what one will, to become a tyrant in one's own city. Now in his answer to Callicles' radical attacks on the conventional notions of justice Socrates seems to be doing the same thing: he appears to be defending common justice and decency against the attacks of an extreme and tyrannical man. Socrates appears also—and this is the crux of the ruse—to be allying philosophy on one side with justice, even conventional justice, against, on the other side, rhetoric and the licentious and unjust political life, or more particularly the life of the tyrant. However, if we consider Socrates' conclusions more carefully we see that he nowhere disagrees with what we decided were Callicles' main concerns and conclusions. In fact Socrates only makes Callicles' position, from the conventional point of view, even more cynical and extreme, if that is possible.

[37] It is at this point that Socrates is called *agroikos,* a country-bumpkin or even worse, wild, of the fields, or, more directly, wild and not of the city. Socrates' *agroikia* or barbaric wildness becomes quite significant both in the *Gorgias* and in the *Hippias Major,* and especially revealing for us; see above, Pindar on Cheiron where he is called *agroteron* using a similar word.

It is my aim here to explain the meaning of Socrates' main conclusions and of their location in the dialogue. As this is not intended to be a complete commentary on the *Gorgias,* it is not necessary to embark on a close analysis of every single argument Socrates uses, though each of these is revealing in a special way. I will, however, consider closely the first argument, because it is representative of Socrates' broader aims in the dialogue, as well as of his methods. In his first substantial argument with Callicles, Socrates reaches the conclusion that nature and convention agree with respect to justice and that therefore nature and convention are not opposites. This would seem to be a straightforward defense of conventional notions of justice against Callicles' immoderate praise of the individual's ambitious pursuit of liberty and tyranny in the name of nature. Socrates says "it is not only by convention that doing wrong is more shameful than suffering it, and having one's equal share is just, but by nature also." [489b] But if we look at how Socrates reached this conclusion, then it cannot be said to be Socrates' real opinion. The conclusion is based on the premise that the stronger in purely physical force is the better, [488c, 488d5] which is not a premise that Socrates, or even Callicles, accepts. Now, why would Socrates be making an argument in which he does not believe? One could answer, in the traditional vein, that Socrates is using Callicles' own premises to trip him up. This would force Callicles to make his definitions more precise, and in the process Callicles would transcend his original position. But the following considerations show that while there is some truth to this way of thinking, it is in the end unlikely.

In his first speech Callicles spoke often of the better or superior men by using the word *beltion*.[38] The *beltion* is a generic term for superiority in goodness. But Callicles also used the word *kreitton,* almost interchangeably. And *kreitton* is also a word for "better" but with clear connotations of strength, bravery, and might. In his first argument Socrates introduces another word: *iskhuroteron,* [488c] which is a word for superiority in brute force or strength, but without even the moral connotations of *kreitton.* Callicles did not use this word in his first speech. As soon as Callicles agrees that all of these terms are interchangeable, Socrates is easily able to point out that the many together are clearly stronger [*iskhuroteroi*] than the one; therefore supposedly by Callicles' own standards they are also better, therefore their ordinances are nobler, and so on.

Callicles, however, had used the terms interchangeably in his speech and had agreed to Socrates' inclusion of the term *iskhuroteron* in the definition of the "superior" for a clear reason that has little to do with the way in which Socrates misuses it. In the "state of nature" to which both he and Glaucon in the *Republic* [358e] refer, the one *is* stronger than the many who are not yet united. They unite and form conventions precisely because they are weaker and less manly than the few stronger, and because they wish to curb the advantage of these. [483c, 492a7] Socrates is referring to strength, pure physical force in numbers, that is, *after* convention has already been established. In other words, he is, as Callicles charged earlier, again using words with natural meanings in a conventional sense, and vice-versa, when it suits his argument. Callicles is exasperated by this ruse. He points out

[38] The comparative of the Greek *agathon,* the word for good that we find for example in *kaloikagathoi,* "the beautiful [noble] and the good," the term for gentlemen and aristocrats.

that the equality between terms must move in both directions and not only in one direction. Socrates attempted to obscure the issue when he emphasized merely in the direction of "physical force." Socrates replaced *kreitton,* a word with moral connotations, with *iskhuroteron,* a word with no moral connotations or connotations of quality, and a word that was for a very good reason absent from Callicles' first speech. Callicles seems exasperated already at Socrates' unwillingness to understand what he means when he uses several different words for "superior." The idea that the many, when put together, have an advantage in brute physical strength is a political non-argument, because the many are a political nullity in this sense. They do not lead themselves—a *jacquerie,* again, is never a revolution, and it is historically easily put down. Callicles believes that the practice of rhetoric is what gives the power of rule to an elite in a democracy; he is simply more cynical about the ambitions of those who claim to speak for the people.

Further still, Callicles' failure in the first argument would not have been completed had he not agreed to a certain other key dubious claim. For example, the notion that the ordinances [*nomima*] of the better are noble by nature is to be found nowhere in Callicles' original speech either explicitly or as a consequence of anything that he says. As such the argument is specious and a non-sequitur: and it is essentially the same argument that Thrasymachus falls for in the first book of the *Republic* when he seems oddly unwilling to say that the superior or stronger can make mistakes in the laws they frame. But Callicles' acceding to Socrates' casual claim is especially strange in light of the fact that the whole notion of truth or nobility through speech or decree is entirely absent from Callicles' first speech. In

this speech truth is manifest only in action and practice. However, Callicles does not challenge Socrates' reference to ordinances or *nomima,* but by his silence at this point, and by an explicit reference soon after [489c7], shows a certain respect for this word.

In any case, these elements in Socrates' first argument against Callicles are revealing for the following reasons. Socrates does *not* trip up Callicles by playing on Callicles' own premises, but by subtly moving the conversation in a new direction, by introducing new notions. The notion of *iskhus* or pure force is, as I have already pointed out, absent from Callicles' first speech.[39] Socrates achieves his ends not by referring clearly and honestly to Callicles' own conclusions, but instead by emphasizing one half of an equivalence while obscuring the other, proceeding question by question and step by step in an entirely new direction. Finally, Socrates achieves his end by making a claim that was neither present in his opponent's speech nor the consequence of anything his opponent said—that the ordinances of the superior are also superior—but that he knows will be, for certain reasons, attractive to this particular opponent. These reasons are not yet clear.

Exasperated by Socrates' sophistic demands that Callicles identify the superior, Callicles declares at 491d, "But I have really told you already that [they are] the prudent [*phronimoi*] in the matters of the city and the manly [*andreioi*]. These should rule the cities, and right is this, that they should have more than the

[39] Although he does refer to military ventures to exemplify the way of nature, and the word for force occurs in the poem from Pindar that he quotes or misquotes, these being the only such examples in the whole speech, Callicles nowhere remarks on the force used by *nomos* against *phusis,* or the force used to restrain the superior; he is concerned only with the state of mind of the man who must escape *nomos,* and even his realization of tyranny does not include any discussion of violence or force, as opposed to Polus' earlier remarks on the same subject.

rest, the rulers than the ruled." [491d] The superior are decided to be the prudent with regard to political matters and the manly. The latter is a quality Callicles especially emphasizes by adding that these men will not falter through effeminacy of soul [*dia malakian tes psukhes*]. [491b] We have already seen that manliness is an absolutely indispensable quality in Callicles' first speech. But Socrates has played a small trick in forcing this definition out of Callicles. He has covertly moved the conversation away from Callicles' main focus, which is the lion cub enslaved by convention. The conversation has moved instead toward the lion cub who is already becoming mature. The question for Callicles was the enslavement of the superior by conventional notions of justice (an enslavement facilitated by the corruption of manliness that philosophy effects in the souls of the superior). If a man is already prudent in politics, *phronimos,* and manly, *andreios,* then he has for the most part already freed himself from the two dangers. He already does rule and does follow his advantage, or is in the process of doing so, according to Callicles. Therefore it is the superior who should *become* these two things but are not necessarily so to start with—this is not, according to Callicles' original position, their ability to begin with, and it is not therefore an appropriate definition. In moving the discussion toward the "end product" and away from the critical issue of the *erromenesteros,* the "raw" material for the superior by nature who has not yet undergone any training, Socrates is moving the discussion away from the raw element of superiority that Callicles hopes will become a tyrant but claims might regrettably also become a philosopher, and that Socrates elsewhere hopes might become a philosopher but claims might regrettably also become a tyrant. [*Rep.* 495-6] Socrates moves the

question away from the most fundamental issue on which philosophy and tyranny meet, even though this was Callicles' main concern in his speech.[40]

But whatever we may say about Socrates' ambiguous remarks on the nature of the superior—he mostly leaves Callicles' definition untouched for the rest of the dialogue or abrogates it for himself—it is very clear that his long attack on the "having more"[41] component of Calliclean natural right must be taken with a grain of salt. In the famous anti-hedonist portion of the *Gorgias* [491d- 510a], Socrates is on the surface praising temperance [*sophrosune*] and attacking licentiousness [*akolasia*]. But we can take none of Socrates' answers or claims in this section at face value. No matter how often Socrates repeats his accusations of licentiousness and no matter how often he praises temperance, he makes certain seemingly off-hand but in fact absolutely key statements that, unless we should be unreasonable and ignore them, change the entire meaning of his discussion.

Socrates starts the attack on "having more" by turning the question of rule over others to the question of ruling oneself. This is a surprising and unnecessary

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[40] Furthermore, the quality of *phronesis* was only implicit in Callicles' speech as a quality that belongs to the superior. While it is Callicles who volunteers *andreia* as a definition without any help from Socrates, it is Socrates who elicits *phronesis* as a definition in a significant way. Socrates does this by alluding to a famous saying of Heraclitus'. [490a] It is the claim that "one man is wiser than ten thousand and deserves to rule," that ties *phronesis* to *arkhe*, and that alludes to political prudence as a right to rule. Callicles readily agrees to this claim, although in so doing he allows for the question to move from the pure advantage of the superior to the advantage of the political community and the need to justify the rule of the superior in the community. This allows Socrates to attack the "having more" component of Callicles' notion of natural right, which takes up the whole of the argument up to 505d.

[41] Callicles repeatedly defines the just by nature as the superior "having more" [*pleon ekhein*] over the inferior, and also ruling [*arkhein*] them. I prefer the awkward but literal translation "having more" to the more common translation of "advantage," because Greek has other more appropriate words for "advantage," and because the concept of actually "having more" of *something* is very important in the *Gorgias*.

turn that Callicles does not at first understand. [491d] When Callicles expresses confusion and asks what he could mean by ruling oneself, Socrates answers that he means "nothing very colorful, *but just as the many [say],* to be temperate and in possession of power over oneself, to be ruling the pleasures and the desires in oneself." [ibid] This is the first remark to which we must pay attention. The words "but just as [according to] the many" [*all'hosper hoi polloi*] cannot be taken in the context of the *Gorgias* merely as a casual statement. The entire argument Socrates makes against rhetoric in the *Gorgias* [521e, 464b, etc.] requires a depreciation of the opinion and judgment of the many in order to make any sense. Socrates tells Polus *that he has nothing to say to the many.* [474a] In particular Callicles, with whom he is presently arguing, entered the discussion by calling Socrates a *demegores,* a speaker to the *demos,* and of speaking only *demegorika,* things addressed to the many, things to which Callicles elsewhere refers as fooleries or stupidities.

Therefore at the very least, the addition of the statement referring to the many in Socrates' definition of self-rule is a rhetorical provocation against Callicles, who does indeed shortly proceed into his second speech, an impassioned speech if not a tirade against temperance and in praise of licentiousness. But in being a provocation it is also therefore a deeply rhetorical statement that cannot reveal Socrates' real position. There is no reason that a philosopher who believes in self-rule and temperance as a matter of justice or simple truth should have to refer to the opinion of the many on the subject, especially if this someone is a Socrates who said the things he said earlier about the multitude, and who is supposedly trying to

convince a Callicles who believes the things he does about the many. The statement is intended as a provocation at this particular point in the dialogue, made against an exasperated and annoyed Callicles, and it is intended to elicit from him the inordinate praise of licentiousness (and thereby of "tyranny") he actually embarks upon from 491c-492e. Socrates is then able to use this extreme speech to stump Callicles in a particularly vulgar way.

Receiving an answer from Callicles that the satisfaction of all of one's desires is indeed what leads to a happy life, Socrates uses an excited oath and twice praises Callicles for not being bashful or ashamed [*apaiskhunthenai*] to admit such a thing. [494c] He asks Callicles if someone who scratches himself perpetually and thereby satisfies a desire will also be leading a happy life. The dramatic peak, which is also the comic peak, of the dialogue is approaching: the next few exchanges, in which Socrates again ironically praises Callicles' manliness and his lack of shame, are absolutely critical to understanding the *Gorgias:*

**Callicles**
What an odd person you are, Socrates—an unskilled demagogue [*demegoros*]!
**Socrates**
Why, of course, Callicles, that is how I upset Polus and Gorgias, and struck them with bashfulness/shame [*aiskhunesthai epoiesa*]; but you, I know, will never be upset or abashed [*aiskhuntheis*]; you are such a manly [*andreios*] fellow. Come, just answer that.
**Callicles**
Then I say that the man also who scratches himself will thus spend a pleasant life.
**Socrates**
And if a pleasant one, a happy one also?
**Callicles**
Certainly.
**Socrates**
Is it so if he only wants to scratch his head? Or what more am I to ask you? See, Callicles, what your answer will be, if you are asked everything in succession that links on to that statement; and the culmination of the case, as stated—the life of catamites—is not that awful, ugly, [*aiskhros*] and wretched? Or will you dare to assert that these are happy if they can freely indulge their wants?
**Callicles**
Are you not ashamed, [*aiskhunei*] Socrates, to lead the discussion into such topics? [494d-e]

The shaming of Callicles[42] is predictable given his character and also his position on natural right—only a bit earlier in his latest definition of the superior he had emphasized manliness [*andreia*] and attacked effeminacy of soul [*malakia tes psukhes*].[43] It is on account of its deleterious effects on manliness that Callicles attacked philosophy in his first speech and temperance in his second. Manliness is in every way central to Callicles' understanding of liberation from convention or of the appearance of the right by nature. Socrates has shamed Callicles by bringing up the example of the most unmanly men[44] and suggesting somehow that they too would satisfy Callicles' criteria for happiness or liberation.

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[42] This episode is treated briefly in Tarnopolsky's generally fine and informative *Prudes Perverts, Tyrants: Plato's Gorgias and the Politics of Shame* Princeton 2010; at pages 39-40 and 84 Tarnopolsky explicitly addresses the matter of the *kinaidos* or catamite and of Callicles' shaming. And yet although Tarnopolsky recognizes that Socrates is a superior wielder of shame to Callicles, Polus, and Gorgias, she does not proceed to consider this fact with respect *both* to the problem of *nomos* and to the passage, discussed on the following page below, at 487e, where Socrates all but admits that any argument that ends in shame will not have led to the truth. Tarnopolsky concedes that Socrates doesn't defeat Callicles through reason or logic, but, again, refuses to consider then the extra step or possibility that Socrates' shaming of Callicles is not in fact meant to chastise or better a tyrannical man, but to hide his own secret kinship with the tyrannical man before a democratic audience. This is because Tarnopolsky is committed to proving that there is a variety of types of shame in the *Gorgias, some of which can be used* profitably in democratic politics. See also Mark Blitz's review in *Perspectives on Politics* Vol. 9, No. 3 (September 2011), pp. 713-715, where some due is given to Tarnopolskys insights and attention to Platonic rhetorical form, yet where the conclusion is ultimately that Tarnopolsky does not take the substance of the argument with Callicles seriously. The divergence between Tarnopolsky's presentation and my own is at the very root of the matter: Tarnopolsky assumes that Callicles, as a tyrannical man, is and must be wrong or bad and therefore that Plato through Socrates is disproving or interested in genuinely chastising Callicles. She does not seem to consider the possibility that Plato gives Callicles the superior argument.

[43] The ancient Greek word for catamite is *kinaidos,* but the modern Greek is *malaka.*

[44] Not only unmanly but slavish, since the *kinaidos* was understood to allow himself to be wronged and harmed and abused, and also lost political rights, see K.J. Dover *Greek Homosexuality* Harvard 1989. According to Callicles this is the distinguishing mark of the slave. [483b, "the endurance [*pathema*] of being wronged is not for a man [*aner*] but for some slave..."; 484b, the superior man living within convention is called a slave] Escape from slavery to convention was Callicles' main point, as I again emphasize, and therefore this example must be especially jarring for him. The issue of course is whether according to Socrates a *kinaidos* is reprehensible by convention only or also by nature. But according to Callicles himself *shame is only a matter of convention:* this side is emphasized in the *Gorgias.* It is in this light that we must understand Callicles' shaming in the *Gorgias.*

But to understand Socrates' rhetorical defeat of Callicles, we have to pay close attention to the theme of *shame* in the *Gorgias,* a theme Callicles made central to his initial speech, and a theme that resurfaces everywhere at critical points. Note that after Callicles' first speech, Socrates praised his frankness [*parrhessia*] and the fact that he lacks shame [*aiskhune*]. Socrates agrees with Callicles that Gorgias and Polus only lost the argument because they were shamed, and therefore tacitly accepts Callicles' notion that shame stands in the way of truth. This is uncontroversial enough, for now. But as Socrates says, "if you can bear me out in any point arising in our argument, that point can at once be taken as having been amply tested by both you and me, and there will be no more need of referring it to a further test; **for no defect of wisdom or access of modesty [*aiskhune*] could ever have been your motive in making this concession,** nor again could you make it to deceive me: for you are my friend, as you say yourself. Hence any agreement between you and me must really have attained the perfection of truth." [487e] Therefore according to Socrates' own claim, we can only be sure that the conclusions he reaches will possess truth or will be in need of no further testing if in fact Callicles will at no point be encumbered by shame [*aiskhune*]. But we have just seen this is not the case, but that at the crucial point, Callicles is encumbered by shame. Callicles is ready to admit that the scratcher fulfils his criteria, but too ashamed to consider the example of the catamite. Therefore we can be sure that whatever explicit conclusion Socrates reaches together with Callicles, either here or in the future, will in fact be in need of further testing, or that it does not necessarily possess truth, or, which is the same thing, that Plato, in having Socrates defeat

Callicles in this manner, exhibits to us the essentially rhetorical character of the entire discussion in the *Gorgias.*[45] Socrates' victory over Callicles has little to do with the truth or falsehood of the matter being discussed. It is for show, or display: a display of something other than dialectical truth. In fact the entire *Gorgias* is "for show"; it is a sinister dialogue, marked by a sinister theatricality in which all the characters come masked. There is no one we know of by the name of Callicles.

After being compared first to an eternal bird defecator [494b] and next to a passive homosexual, Callicles is shamed or annoyed and remains relatively silent for the rest of the dialogue. On several occasions he wants to end the conversation.[46] This allows Socrates to push through some points that, in light especially of what we have just considered, should at least raise eyebrows. At the end of his attack on intemperance, Socrates makes seemingly the most extreme case in favor of conventional morality and of convention in general. This is all supposedly against Callicles' praise of natural tyranny and licentiousness.

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[45] Furthermore, as indicated above, Socrates has repeatedly been called rude to the point of being *agroikos,* not of the city. Although Callicles' statements are the ones that appear most overtly anti-conventional and radical, the means by which Socrates shames him justifies the description of Socrates as *agroikos:* a wild man, not of the city, rude in the extreme. His disconnect from any sense of shame and therefore from any conventional notions is far more advanced than Callicles', even if he should pose as the defender of convention. The rest of the *Gorgias,* as we will see, bears this out.

[46] e.g., 497b, Gorgias has to reenter the argument to force Callicles to continue. On this account see Nalin Ranasinghe *Socrates in the Underworld: On Plato's Gorgias* South Bend 2009; it is an account of the myths of the underworld that Socrates uses in the second part of his argument with Callicles, during much of which Callicles himself is silent. Ranasinghe's approach is explicitly theological and is to be prized for taking Plato's myths seriously, as prefigurations of Christian doctrine. In many ways his parallels between the sophistic misuse of language and the "postmodernism" he decries in our own time allow him to make important insights about Gorgianic rhetoric. Nevertheless, he again refuses to consider that Callicles represents anything other than a species of moral corruption and therefore doesn't take the substance of Callicles' remarks seriously. Furthermore Ranasinghe perhaps does not see the rather ridiculous figure Socrates cuts in debating with himself and in mythologizing piously in front of an audience—Callicles, Polus—which likely only has complete contempt for such things. Is Socrates *demegorein?*

Socrates says that "the soul's arrangements and orders are lawfulness [*nomimon*] and law [*nomos*], from whence [men] become law-abiding [*nomimoi*] and orderly: these are justice and temperance." [504d] This is the acme, as it were, of Socrates' praise of *nomos.* But *nomos* means not just convention but also law or way: Callicles had earlier referred to the *nomos* of nature. [483e] And if we should read the statements that precede this seemingly inordinate praise of conventional justice and temperance, we see that Socrates is not in fact defending common morality, but likening the lawful soul to the healthy body or to the well-turned-out work of art. As examples of *nomima* Socrates does not refer to any good men and good souls, not to speak of good laws, but only to the productions of consummate craftsmen and to natural objects. Therefore even here it cannot be said that Socrates is in truth defending "what the many say" are justice and temperance against Callicles' attacks on these conventional notions. But finally, the very limited or merely rhetorical and ad-hominem nature of Socrates' argument against "having more" or in favor of temperance becomes clear if we consider the following statement Socrates makes at the end of his presentation:

> Isn't it the case that the filling of one's desires—such as if one is hungry, to eat as much as he wants, or if thirsty to drink—when one is in health the doctors do allow with respect to many things, but when one is worked-out, so to speak, they never allow to fill oneself with what one desires? ...and regarding the soul, O best one, is it not the same way? So long as it should be in pains, being unthoughtful and intemperate and unjust and unholy, it is necessary to bar its way of desires and not let it turn toward anything except that of which it might become better... [505b]

Now this analogy, though Socrates does not really follow it up, and although a bored Callicles does not address it, qualifies the entire preceding discussion. The fact that it is only expressed once does not matter. It is in fact an incoherent

admission even as it stands, since licentiousness [*akolasia*] was earlier understood as the filling of one's desires at will. [491e ff.][47] Yet here Socrates is saying both that the filling of one's desires at will is allowed when one is healthy, and also that the same thing, licentiousness [*akolasia*], is a symptom of a sick soul in pains. Now clearly we must resolve this tension in the following way, and realize that licentiousness itself is not an evil but absolutely a positive good when the soul is healthy, and that it is only an evil when the soul is sick. For philosophy itself appears in the *Gorgias* [481d-e] but also elsewhere in the Platonic corpus—the *Symposium* is only the most explicit and best known example—as a matter of freely entertaining the most intense *eros,* the most intense desire imaginable.[48] The philosopher's temperance and justice are merely side-effects, and if they exist at all, are for show. They only appear to the public as primary causes or as attachment to morality, that is, to law and convention. The philosopher arrives at this condition, however, *not* by restraining anything but by filling the desires of a healthy soul. The merely moral man, the man restrained by temperance and justice as a matter of habit and

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[47] For a species of relatively conventional scholarship on the *Gorgias* that is relevant here consider for a moment George Klosko, "The Refutation of Callicles in Plato's 'Gorgias'" *Greece & Rome* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Oct., 1984), pp. 126-139; Callicles is, yet again, depicted as the punching bag for Socrates' supposedly dazzling oratory, although here the excuse is given that Plato "had" to give Callicles an untenable position and bad arguments in order to allow his mouthpiece Socrates to attack "a life of physical pleasure." Again there is an unwillingness to consider the possibility that Callicles is right, has the superior argument, and even would appear to have the superior argument to an audience that is not quite convinced of Socrates' piety or his competence. In particular, the silencing of Callicles, again, by no means implies that Socrates has won the argument and statements such as the one quoted above (comparing 505b to 491eff.) where Socrates so blatantly contradicts his own premises are ignored. This happens because traditional readers of the *Gorgias* are unwilling to tunnel into the tyrannical statements of Callicles, and look at the substance. The assumption is made that he must be as such wrong. Therefore much is missed, including the fact that Socrates would not necessarily end up looking very good in front of an ancient audience of Greek men with his pious trances and moralistic mythologizing.

[48] For this interpretation of the *Symposium* see Allan Bloom's interpretive essay in his translation of *Republic* Basic Books 1991

convention, lives under a tyrant and wishes to be a tyrant—as we learn from Socrates himself at the very end of the *Republic.* [619b-d] There could in truth be no greater agreement between Socrates and Callicles on the tyrannical and enslaving character of conventional justice and restraint as opposed to the liberating character of *eros* and even of licentiousness in healthy souls.

Callicles, who is not a sick soul and does not have an inordinate desire to become a perpetual scratcher, defecator, or catamite, is bored and annoyed by what must seem to him like Socrates' disingenuous and pious moralizing. He all but drops out of the argument, which forces Socrates to embark on perhaps the most lunatic and most exasperating portion of the dialogue: a question-and-answer session with himself. (It is difficult to see how any reader can take Socrates seriously at this point and not see this as a Platonic parody of the Socratic method.) But Socrates then suddenly switches focus and for the rest of the *Gorgias* attempts a different argument, one that plays more closely to Callicles' character and to the concerns he revealed in his two long speeches.[49] Callicles comes alive again when Socrates changes topic and asks,

> Now what can be the art of providing so that we suffer no wrong, or as little as possible? See if it seems to you as it does to me. **For to me it seems like this: either one must rule [*arkhein*] in the city or be a tyrant [*turannein*], or else be a companion of the existing regime [*politeia*]. [510a]**

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[49] We must consider Socrates' arguments about purging licentiousness from the soul baseless because in the *Gorgias,* unlike in the *Republic,* there is never any attempt to define justice. Similarly, if we compare the argument for the purging of licentiousness in the *Gorgias* at 492e ff. with the parallel argument in the *Republic* 372e-399e, especially 398c-403c (as preliminary to discussion of justice at 441c-445a), where Socrates uses the same terms and seemingly the same ideas, we at once must realize the limited and inadequate character of the case Socrates makes in the *Gorgias.* There is no attempt, as there is in the *Republic,* to painstakingly construct a city in speech that would win Callicles' loyalty the way Socrates wins Adeimantus' and Glaucon's loyalty. Glaucon is Callicles' "cousin," on account not only of their erotic characters, but also if we consider Glaucon's speech at *Rep.* 358e ff. in light of Callicles' speeches in the *Gorgias.* Glaucon is arguably a Callicles to whom Socrates got in time.

This immediately appeals to Callicles for two clear reasons. First of all, in his first speech but also later Callicles had repeatedly advised Socrates on what measures he must take to protect himself from suffering wrong. The sense of Socrates' impending destruction at the hands of inferior men—a concern in which Callicles is proven right, as we know—reappears throughout the dialogue. Second, Socrates uses here the same words Callicles used during his second speech, when he said that temperance would be a vice for whoever already has or can procure an *arkhe* or *turanneia* in the city. [492b-c] Socrates' sudden concession that the political life can provide power or at least safety excites Callicles. But characteristically, Socrates has introduced an entirely new concept and word into the *Gorgias*. This is the first instance of the notion of the regime, or the word *politeia*. This is the means by which Socrates radicalizes the message of Callicles' first speech: in light of Socrates' subsequent discussion of the primacy of the regime, Callicles' opinions on the supremacy of convention or *nomos* seem limited and naïve. Socrates replaces *nomos* with *politeia*: the regime, *politeia,* is, as it were, the actualization of convention, it is *nomos* made concrete through physical force, which was absent from Callicles' story.

The issue of the primacy of the regime is in truth closely related to the strange title of the *Gorgias,* an issue we would do well to look at before we consider Socrates' argument. We have already noted that Callicles and not Gorgias is the center of the dialogue in every way. Why is a man like Callicles at the center of a dialogue on political rhetoric titled the *Gorgias?* Is it because he exhibits the practice of political rhetoric in a revealing way? No doubt this is the case, but this is not a

satisfying answer. Note, however, that for Callicles the precondition of the just or noble life by nature is political power, in particular tyrannical power over the city. [492b, 484a, etc.] But Gorgias says that the virtue of rhetoric is to provide such power to men within their cities. [452d] Polus seconds this claim repeatedly throughout his argument with Socrates. Gorgias' student Meno echoes this claim in another dialogue.[50]

There should be no surprise then that a man like Callicles, who embodies and defends the tyrannical political life, should appear at the center of a dialogue on political rhetoric. But the point seems to be that Gorgias' and Callicles' understanding of power or rule is politically limited and naïve. I have already remarked on how Socrates introduces the question of physical power or force into his argument with Callicles, whose understanding of political control and political action was entirely in terms of speech. The introduction of the issue of physical force into the argument already foreshadows the direction Socrates is to take. The absence of force from Callicles' first speech, and the naïvete Polus exhibits on this subject, already indicates the politically limited understanding of the traditional orators. Socrates at one point hints at the great difference between the actual physical power of the tyrant and the power in speech of the orator. [469d] Did Archelaus [470d ff.] achieve his power through rhetoric?[51] Can Gorgias teach a kind

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[50] *Meno* 73c

[51] Polus, in praising the tyrannical power rhetoric supposedly supplies, presented Archelaus and not any rhetor as the best example of the tyrant. But Archelaus took power by trickery, murder, and force, not by rhetoric. It is also amusing and suggestive, though I imagine not convincing to all readers, to mention that in the *Gorgias* rhetoric is said to be used for two purposes, namely the ability to escape or "get away" [*diaphugon*] with becoming a tyrant, and the ability to escape punishment in the law courts, in particular Socrates' ability or inability to escape his foreshadowed prosecution. In

of rhetoric—perhaps a private rhetoric—that can sway men like Archelaus?[52] Is not the Gorgianic version of tyrannical power through public rhetoric limited to cities that actually have public assemblies, and assemblies of a certain kind?[53]

Callicles' interchangeable use of *demos* and *nomos* [482e] is key, because it shows radically that his horizon and therefore his critique of convention is limited to the democratic regime. He is not able to consider or attack "convention" in all its aspects, because he has only been able to attack Athenian convention. Or, which is the same, his understanding of convention is mediated by his experience of the Athenian regime. In a certain sense he is correct theoretically. Socrates elsewhere says that it is impossible for the *demos* to philosophize.[54] A philosopher must free himself from convention, and it is possible to maintain in theory an essential relationship between *nomos* and *demos,* as Callicles clearly does. Callicles *may* be right that the *demos* is the source of all convention, but only considering the *genesis* of convention out of the state of nature. But in practice Callicles has chosen the political path of liberation, and in practice the *regime* is the concrete actualization of convention and enforcer of conventions. In actual practice, Callicles' following statement is politically limited to democracy:

> ...The makers of the laws are the weaker sort of men, and the more numerous. So it is a view to themselves and their own interest that they make their laws and distribute their praises and blames; and to terrorize the stronger sort of folk...they tell them that...having more is shameful and unjust... [483b-c]

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other words, Socrates is tacitly and metaphorically compared to a tyrant who attempts to get away with usurping power in the city.

[52] Obviously not; Gorgias only claims to teach public rhetoric. The idea of private rhetoric is in the Socratic tradition, e.g., the end of the *Phaedrus.*

[53] Rhetoric was not likely to be very useful even in the public assemblies of Sparta or states like Sparta. Cf. the whole beginning of the *Hippias Major,* but also, again, the introduction of Aeschines' *Against Timarchus,* for a confirmation of this view in popular opinion.

[54] *Republic* 494a

Can such a thing be said about the conventions in Sparta or Egypt? Yet Callicles is not a Spartan sympathizer. The *politeia* is that which is in fact the source of the convention; the many, the people, are arguably the source of convention or conventions only in a democratic regime—even here it is likely the flatterers of the people who originate the *nomos*. The lack of awareness of the power and primacy of the regime is characteristic of the orators, who imagine that they rule when in fact they must accommodate themselves to the beast and serve it. [466b-e, 510a-d, 513b, *Rep.* 493a-d, 495a] This is a consequence of their misplaced trust in the power of a certain kind of rhetoric that is weak, limited, and even so applicable only to certain types of regimes.

In being a student of Gorgias Callicles has an inordinate respect for the power of speech.[55] It is on account of this fact that his understanding of enslavement by convention lacks any mention of force. Socrates' introduction of force [*iskhus,* 488c] into the discussion of political control points to the crucial difference between Socratic and Gorgianic politics. A basic impression of this difference is available through the consideration of another Socrates-Gorgias pair, this time in Xenophon's *Anabasis.* There one may compare Xenophon, the student of Socrates, with Proxenus, the student of Gorgias. The chief difference has to do with political acumen. Proxenus is limited to influence only among the gentlemen. But Xenophon possesses the ability to communicate easily among all classes of men and with all

[55] Consider the only original Gorgianic fragment available to us.

regimes.[56] The difference between the two—the fact that Xenophon is "tougher and wilier" than Proxenus—reflects the fact that Socrates is "tougher and wilier" than Gorgias.[57] Socrates introduces the element of force in the discussion of convention, and thereby the concept of the actual political regime, *politeia,* the reality through which *nomos* becomes actual and concrete. The *politeia* is at once the work of the law-giver, the *nomothetes,* literally the establisher of convention, and the source and sustainer of all particular *nomoi.*[58] The *politeia* brings the consideration of assimilation and enslavement of the superior into a more immediate and concrete sphere of action than was available in Callicles' politically limited horizon.

Callicles pursues political life but does not realize it is the political regime, the *polis* and its rulers, who enslave through convention. Socrates points out that a man who will want to be in such kind of power as is required for Callicles' version of the just or best life will have to assimilate himself or homogenize himself with respect to the ruler, to the regime. [510d, 511a] He plays on Callicles' fears of enslavement and desires for liberation, on account of which Callicles had chosen the political life in the first place, to make him avoid political life as the orators practice it. Callicles had it all wrong in his model of liberation—conformity and literally homogeneity,[59] not revolt, is the means to power, particularly when one seeks power through public speaking in a democratic regime. Callicles will have to *praise* and *blame* the same things as the regime does [510c]—exactly the same words

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[56] Xenophon *Anabasis* II.6.16-20, compare with III.4, etc.
[57] For a detailed discussion of this difference see Strauss SPPP "Xenophon's *Anabasis*" esp. pgs. 110-6
[58] See the very end of Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics,* compare to remarks on legislation at *Gorgias* 520a implying the nobler quality of legislation [*nomothetike*] as opposed to justice [*dikaiosune*]
[59] 513b, [*ou gar mimeten dei einai all'autophuos homoion*]

Callicles used twice in regard to how the convention establishes itself and enslaves the souls of the superior. [483c, 492b] He will have to accustom himself out of his youth [*ek neou,* 510d] to the ruler or the valuations of the regime, just as in Callicles' account the superior are taken from their youth [*ek neon,* 483e] like lions and formed to be in accord with the valuations of the *nomos.* With no knowledge of what is actually noble, the man who seeks the rule that is a necessary prerequisite to Callicles' best life or to what is just by nature, will have to conform to the conventional notions of the noble: and if these are not in fact noble by nature, then the superior man will corrupt himself in the process. [511a] Worse still, the *demos,* the regime on which orators depend and which, as we have seen, is for Callicles intimately related to the idea of *nomos,* [482e] will ultimately destroy the superior men it uses or who cater to it. [519a-b, 520b, etc.]

The means by which the superior men are corrupted and even killed by the regime are, *in Socrates' words, therefore remarkably similar* to the means by which, in Callicles' speech, they were corrupted by the *nomos.* Socrates does not therefore challenge, but even radicalizes Callicles' hostility to *nomos* in this second argument.[60] Both Callicles' tyrannical and Socrates' philosophical life are based, from their respective points of view, on a similar attitude toward the existing regimes or existing human conventions. The discussion in Book VI of the *Republic,* 491a ff. only supports this claim. In fact the use of the word *erromenesteros* in that

[60] Callicles is still not persuaded but at least recognizes Socrates is right, 513c. In this last passage he even willingly admits he agrees with "the many" on a point where Socrates does not. He is receptive to and may be swayed by this argument in a way not possible with the former argument against licentiousness, at least not as it is in the *Gorgias.* But the previous argument conceivably supported conventional notions, whereas the present one rejects them more radically than Callicles does.

passage is parallel to Callicles' use of the word in his first speech in the *Gorgias*. In both cases a rare or superior natural specimen is corrupted by human convention or by the conventions of the regime. The corruption takes place in the soul, whether by means of imitation of the regime and its conventions, or as a result of bewitchment by these conventions; in both cases the corruption enslaves the superior, and finally obscures from them their proper liberation and hence the just by nature.

It is difficult to see then by what reasoning Socrates is said to have "refuted" Callicles in this dialogue. The two seem to agree on the fact that the *erromenesteros* and his salvation and preservation is what matters; that without this, there is neither philosophy, nor tyranny, nor the "original" and raw, wild biological matter from which each uniquely grows. And the character of Socrates' "refutation" even seems to confirm that Callicles' choice of tyranny was itself motivated by the same desire for the "preservation of nature," that is, of breeding. The only serious refutation in their exchange has to do with Socrates' criticism of Callicles' *political naïvete.* Overt tyranny in the name of nature and breeding—like Socrates' student Critias attempted—is not possible and causes an even greater conventional or democratic counter-reaction. Callicles is too "caught up" in conventional assumptions and a conventional frame to properly challenge, or to manipulate, convention. He doesn't have the necessary *remove* from convention to really understand how to seduce and subdue it. He doesn't understand the new rhetoric that Plato teaches: that is, I would claim that not only do Socrates and Callicles agree fundamentally on the "problem"—the salvation of the *erromenesteros* and thereby of *phusis* from convention—but even on the ultimate solution, which is "to rule in

the city." It is only that Plato is much wilier about how to achieve this and that, in fully understanding the requirements of rule and therefore of legislation in the highest degree, he realizes Callicles' aristocratic radicalism must be spiritualized; and similarly the form of (rhetorical) warfare for which Callicles is eager must be spiritualized, or intellectualized.

*III. Brief Note on Platonic Rhetoric and the Platonic Defense of Philosophy—*

*a) Restatement of the Rhetorical Aims of the* Gorgias; *the Inconsistency Between the View Presented on Rhetoric in the* Gorgias *and that in Other Dialogues*

Why are Socrates' replies to Callicles so bizarre? In light of the preceding considerations, several questions must force themselves on any reasonable reader. Why would Socrates choose to make his case in this round-about way? What is he trying to achieve in pretending to side with conventional morality while he rhetorically distances himself from his close cousin, Callicles? Why not just come out with it? Why does Plato choose to exhibit the radical connection between the tyrant and the philosopher only by the evasions, omissions, and rhetorical tricks of two interlocutors in a dialogue? Why does this dialogue exhibit instead, on a first or careless consideration, only the starkest possible contrast or opposition between the tyrant and the philosopher on one hand, and endless repetitions of conventional

moralizing on the other, both types of statements revealing an unstable or contradictory nature only on a closer consideration of the arguments?

The answer has to do with the nature of Socratic rhetoric itself, and with the nature of the Platonic project in general. But we would do well to start with the obvious. In the *Gorgias* but also in the *Republic* the opposition between the philosopher and the tyrant is made in the most extreme way. The passage in the *Republic* is more famous because it is more elaborate, more explicit, and more beautiful. But in both cases the opposition is possible only because of the most systematic repression of the subject of *eros,* or because of the most inordinate attack on intemperance. The very different discussion of *eros* and therefore of desire in the *Symposium,* however, indicates that Socrates clearly is not telling the full story in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic.*[61] The thing on account of which he is so extreme in his attacks on the tyrant also characterizes the philosopher, and characterizes him especially well.[62] This is a provisional indication that the emphasis on the opposition between philosophy and tyranny is rhetorical in nature. This means that it may either contain only a limited truth, or may be outright false.

Plato's desire to present philosophy and tyranny as opposites is understandable in the wake of Socrates' trial and execution. But it also makes sense, again, if one considers the condition of philosophy at the time generally. The death of Socrates was not an isolated event. The earlier imprisonment of Anaxagoras, the persecution of Protagoras, the affair of Aristotle later, and so on, are all examples of

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[61] Again, this is Bloom's reading of how *eros* is abstracted away from in the *Republic.*

[62] On the philosopher as a teacher of erotics see also the dialogue *Lovers,* where furthermore in Pindaric fashion, Plato's utter contempt for mere book learning and mere intellectuals is on display; see discussion in next chapter on physicality in Nietzsche's and Plato's understanding of philosophy.

a general persecution of philosophers taking place around the time of the very birth of philosophy in the Greek world. I have already discussed the nature of this attack, the attack on philosophy in the name of the political community. Philosophy faced the danger of being extinguished at its very birth, by political states based on divine law. Later, after a brief revival in the Islamic and Jewish world it was in fact extinguished by such types of states. The charge against Socrates in particular was motivated by the perception that he taught young men to be tyrannical. The understanding that Socrates was guilty above all of having taught Alcibiades and Critias, murderous and tyrannical traitors to the regime, remained, as we have seen, current for a long time after the trial itself. And in fact it is clear that the charge was not narrowly against Socrates the man as a particular political actor, but against philosophy itself in general. It was understood that his very philosophical activity, or philosophical activity in general, somehow encouraged tyranny.

But by now it is clear why Plato as well as Xenophon and some other of Socrates' students would want to present tyranny and philosophy as complete opposites. In the context of a defense of philosophy in the cities, this is an absolute necessity. Not merely to speak about, but to actually show, in a theatrical setting, a Socrates attacking tyranny and defending justice against the cynical, ambitious, and impious claims of opportunistic orators and political men, all in the presence of young students, as in the *Gorgias;* or to show Socrates leading two youths to the cause of justice and temperance, as in the *Republic,* when these are precisely the types he was accused of corrupting and encouraging toward tyranny—all of this has great value with respect to the apologetic project, with respect to making

philosophy, previously despised, publicly defensible and even respectable in the cities: "the philosopher does not teach tyranny; he teaches piety and justice."[63]

As part of this apologetic interpretation of the Socratic dialogues, note that Callicles is directly likened to Alcibiades in the *Gorgias.* [e.g., 519a] We should not forget how absolutely central and potent the corruption of Alcibiades was in the charges made against Socrates.[64] And so it is clear that, in showing Socrates in the process of trying to reform a young man very much like Alcibiades, in the process of trying to lead him away from tyranny and toward self-restraint, Plato is addressing directly one of the major accusations against his mentor.[65]

Now in this light it becomes clear why Plato would not wish to present the kinship between philosophy and tyranny overtly, even if such a kinship existed, as I maintain here that it does. If Socrates' corruption of Alcibiades—the charge that he led Alcibiades away from the gods of the city, from convention, and toward tyranny—was one of the principal illustrations of the evils philosophy works in the state, we should not expect that Plato would openly exhibit Socrates agreeing with the Alcibiades-like Callicles on the central points on which they do in fact agree. Such an agreement would not be spelled out but rather would be shown in action, in

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[63] See *Republic* 494a-497a

[64] Aside from the very clear reference given above from Aeschines' *Against Timarchus,* it is obvious that Alcibiades' lusting after tyrannical power was legendary see Robin Seager "Alcibiades and the Charge of Aiming at Tyranny" *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte,* Bd. 16, H. 1 (Mar., 1967), pp. 6-18

[65] But the repeated parallelisms should also indicate that if Socrates is ready to compare Callicles to one of the two great loves of his life, 481d, then we can be sure that Socrates cares deeply for Callicles, a realization that would support my aforegoing reflections and my general claim in this study. Socrates would not be expressing this type of attachment to a Thrasymachus, a "vulgar" conventionalist who only abuses the philosophical insight for personal gain. Although even the latter position would be sufficient for my study, if only one realizes that the original philosophical insight—the distinction between nature and convention—is singularly easy to abuse. But I claim rather more, see below.

the manner I have indicated above, by implications, omissions, tacit agreements, inconsistent or contradictory statements, and other such things. Such an insight would only be available to the careful or philosophical reader, who could actually profit from discovering it, and who could profit even more by observing how Plato obscures it for rhetorical or political purposes. But on the surface the apologetic nature of the dialogue, the peculiar form of rhetoric that defends philosophy before the tribunal of the city, before the conventional political opinions of decent citizens, would be at all costs maintained.

In fact, if a philosopher is on one hand concerned with communicating to potential philosophers the true way to liberation, the precondition for philosophy itself, that must consist in a radical departure from convention and from the regime; and yet if, on the other hand he is concerned with exonerating his mentor or philosophy itself from accusations and opinions such as we know were entertained against Socrates; then he will be forced to *present both the case for and the method of such liberation only* in the context of an overt if rhetorical defense of conventional justice and a condemnation of tyranny. Only in this way will he be able to pre-empt the charge that the philosopher's wild nature, his *agroikia,* his departure from convention, is *ipso facto* an encouragement for tyranny. And his presentation of the idea of a new and wily political rhetoric on behalf of philosophy must likewise take place only in the context of the most indignant opposition against the popular rhetoric of the orators, the type of rhetoric looked down upon by all decent men.

In connection with the last claim I make also the following hypothesis. The presentation in the *Gorgias* is not meant merely to achieve the twofold aim, but a

third and more important one. This twofold aim would be, again, on one hand to advise potential philosophers on the necessity of liberation from convention. And on the other hand it would be to do so only in the context of assuring the cities that this liberation would not encourage tyranny or injustice, or, indeed, not to even make it look like a liberation. But I think Plato goes much farther. He makes philosophy not only compatible with, but the apotheosis of, justice, and he claims the philosopher is *the true possessor of the political art.* [521c] The philosopher appears almost divine.[66] In showing just *how* the philosopher liberates himself while forming a political alliance with convention, Plato aims, I say, for a third goal beyond the two just mentioned. This would be the rule of philosophy in the cities, the foundation of political philosophy literally, as a politically *active* philosophy, and not merely as reflection on the political things—and not just politically active, but actually ruling. It would be to achieve Callicles' aims—the aims of pre-Socratic political thought—by other means. Clearly then the practice of a new kind of *rhetoric* is *the* key tool.

Now in considering the view on rhetoric, we see immediately that Socrates' overt and most famous position on rhetoric in the *Gorgias* is itself limited, contradictory, and all but a ruse. In his discussion with Polus Socrates condemns rhetoric absolutely and without qualification, as a form of flattery, as definitely not an art, and as powerless. He calls it the phantom image of the true art of caring for the soul, which is justice, and which is analogous especially to medicine, the art of caring for the body. [464b-465e] But later Socrates claims that there is a good type

[66] See the discussion leading up to 504d. Now, this is all clearly a rhetorical project in the *Gorgias,* not only because of what I show above, but, I repeat, because of the crucial fact that justice is nowhere defined by Socrates in this text. This fact must be considered in light of his argument with Gorgias about the definition of rhetoric, and with Callicles about the definition of the superior.

of rhetoric, and he also claims he possesses the true political art. [520a-521c] To say that this represents a refinement of the earlier statement is not sufficient, because Socrates at no point defines two types of rhetoric; his first condemnation of rhetoric is not a condemnation only of the common political oratory used in courts and assemblies, but, again, a condemnation of rhetoric without any qualification. Furthermore, his comments on rhetoric in the *Gorgias* explicitly contradict his comments on the same subject in the *Menexenus* on one hand and in the *Phaedrus* on the other. For example in the *Phaedrus* rhetoric appears as the analogue of medicine in the soul,[67] where in the *Gorgias* it is said to be the opposite of this. And while Pericles is completely depreciated in the *Gorgias,* he appears in a positive light in the *Phaedrus,* where Socrates admits that he possessed the art of rhetoric in a high degree, indeed that he is the most perfect orator. This concession is especially important because in the *Phaedrus* Pericles' possession of the art of rhetoric is attributed to his training, not by any traditional teacher of rhetoric, but at the hands of Anaxagoras, a philosopher of nature.[68] And Socrates' early attachment to Anaxagoras is well known.[69] Furthermore, where in the *Gorgias* Socrates distances himself most clearly from Pericles, whom Callicles admires, in the *Menexenus* Socrates indicates, not only his admiration for Pericles and his rhetorical ability, but also the fact that the two men had the same teacher of rhetoric in Aspasia.[70] In other words, where in the *Gorgias* Socrates makes every effort to have philosophy appear the opposite of political rhetoric, in the two other dialogues a very strong kinship

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[67] *Phaedrus* 270b
[68] *Phaedrus* 269e-270a
[69] e.g., *Phaedo* 96-100, Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Socrates,* etc.
[70] *Menexenus* 235e; Aspasia was their teacher of rhetoric and possibly of *erotics*

between the two is maintained. Where in the *Gorgias* philosophy appears the ally of justice or medicine and rhetoric appears the ally of tyranny and intemperance and sickness of soul, in the *Phaedrus* rhetoric is the medicine of the soul and the highest science of human souls. Where in the *Gorgias* Socrates distances himself from political men and in particular from Pericles, in the other dialogues on rhetoric a close relationship between the two is maintained.

The Platonic defense of philosophy in the cities has, in light of these reflections, a deeper and more significant meaning. It is not merely a defense of philosophy: it is not merely an apology for the Epicurean retirement of the philosopher. It is a project far more ambitious, a project that seeks active political aims in the city on behalf of philosophy. The animus against Callicles' imprudent praise of tyranny and imprudent advocacy of the advantage of the *erromenesteroi,* an advantage which is clearly also Socrates' concern as we have seen at *Republic* 493a-494e, represents not merely an ingenuous way to defend philosophy against the accusations of the *polis* in theory but indeed an entirely new political program with the final aim for rule, for holding *arkhe.* In the following I only suggest the general features and motivations of this program.

To be faced with death or banishment personally, and with the extinction of one's way of life generally, sharpens the political issues for a keen mind. The decision over what orientation to take with respect to political society was a sharp and pressing issue for philosophers at the time. The path of Callicles amounts to an open declaration of war by philosophers upon the cities. The fates of Socrates and others, and possibly of Callicles himself, if he existed, indicate that no matter how

excellent the dialectical skill and political acumen of such men, the cities were winning the war. Socrates' argument with Callicles, and his attempt to reform Callicles represents not merely a prudent defense of the philosopher before the common accusations of the *polis.* It represents not merely the attempt to show that there is a political danger in making the prerequisites for philosophical life public, because these might be cynically abused by ambitious and tyrannical men for their own gain. In light of my previous reflections on Callicles' essentially *philosophic* nature or character, Socrates' argument, or Plato's exposition in the *Gorgias* as a whole, represents an attempt to reform the political attitudes of philosophers *themselves.* It represents, arguably, an exhortation to philosophers and sophists—who are not, at the time, the opposites of philosophers in any sense—to abandon their radical rhetoric and their attempt to violently usurp power in the cities, and to pursue a different means for this same end.

The Platonic project as exhibited in the *Gorgias* and elsewhere—most of all in the *Republic*—is a total revolution with respect to the philosophers' political orientation. In the *Republic,* as is clear from the reflections above, Socrates uses the same tools of convention that Callicles claims enslave the superior to the city, to make the city instead submit to the superior. The two cannot be brought together on the common ground of the superior: the many do not philosophize.[71] The way to the supremacy and the safety of philosophy—the two are the same, it is admitted in the *Gorgias*—is not to openly reject convention, but slowly to insinuate oneself as its ally and reform it from within. The way of the future would no longer be rabid and

[71] *Republic* 494a

absolute anti-conventionalism, but the reform of convention itself and of political regimes themselves, from within, by using the wiliest rhetorical techniques, by accepting the premises and limitations of convention in politics, and by fashioning an alliance of sorts, if only an expedient or rhetorical one, between philosophy and the city's conventional justice.

Such an alliance would supposedly be good not only for the philosophers, but also for the cities. Philosophers, as allies of civic virtue, and as paragons of moral virtue in the open—or rather as *actors* pretending to moral virtue—would benefit the cities: this is the birth of political philosophy, that is at once for the political benefit of philosophy in the cities, and for the political benefit of the cities themselves.[72]

For now, let us temporarily agree with this salutary Platonic image. In the *Gorgias,* for example, there is a clear illustration of this idea. Socrates suppresses the identity of tyranny and philosophy on the subject of *eros* or "having more," as we have seen. Now this is not merely a ploy to defend philosophy, though it is this as well. It is also an indication to philosophers that to make their fundamental character public and to defend it, or to defend animus against convention publicly, as Callicles does, leads not only to the encouragement of tyranny but to the general dissolution of any state and to the proliferation of moral decadence. It would lead to conditions in which not only philosophy, but any kind of political health or dynamism would be impossible. Only in the case of men of great ability and will would the public defense of "having more" or of licentiousness lead to something

[72] This is, again, a condensation of Leo Strauss' view as appears in part, e.g., at OT 205-7

good—it is only good for "healthy" souls; in the general case, presumably of botched souls and insufficient natures, it would lead merely to decay, weakness, and wretchedness. The accusation that "having more" leads to the life of the catamite is clearly not directed against Callicles—no sane reader would believe that such a life was ever on Callicles' mind in his defense of licentiousness. This accusation is an indication to philosophers that to make their erotic character public and to defend it, in the Calliclean manner, will lead to general political and social decay—for as Nietzsche says, there is no congruence between the sensuality of the artist and of the people.

The suppression of this identity between philosophy and tyranny as to their unique *erotic* character, is then undertaken not only for the defense of the philosophy, but for the sake of the city. In the 20th century, in the work of, e.g., Andre Gide, we have a comic fulfillment of what Socrates implies would happen when philosophers take the Calliclean approach. Gide, and others, use Nietzsche's open avowal and defense of philosophic unconventionalism, his Calliclean genealogy of morality, precisely to defend in public the cause of sexual liberation. Whatever one's opinions may be for or against such a program, it is a misunderstanding of Nietzsche (or of Callicles) to use their particular kind of antinomianism for this end.[73] But it is a predictable outcome of imprudently having made the philosophical nature public. Where, like Callicles, Nietzsche was hoping that by doing so he was defending the interests of the superior against the ubiquitous modern egalitarianism, his insights have become, by our time, the tools of the most extreme egalitarianism that seeks to

[73] As Allan Bloom put it, using Nietzsche, or conceivably Callicles, to challenge sexual morality "is like using heavy artillery to take over a molehill."

deny all nature and to justify the very life of the "Last Man" that Nietzsche denounced.[74] The inevitable misuse of the philosophical case for licentiousness and against conventional restraint is already evident in Socrates' shaming of Callicles at 494d. Philosophers must defend the virtues of the many—chiefly, self-restraint, *sophrusune,* and justice—if they are to rule, and if they are to have anything to rule at all.

*b) Birth and Meaning of Platonic Rhetoric Exposed in the* Hippias Major[75]

A good illustration of Plato's "rhetoric for philosophers," of his exhortation to "clean up their image," to make themselves political and presentable, and also an illustration of *how* this may be done can be found in his *Hippias Major,* a dialogue most pertinent to my main argument here about philosophy achieving rule in the cities through oratory; to which we may now briefly turn.

The *Hippias Major* is an unusual dialogue; its authenticity has been questioned. It may or may not be true that someone other than Plato wrote this dialogue. But even if this is true, it will make the dialogue in some ways more useful for our purposes. This is because, whoever wrote it, the dialogue has been accepted as part of the Platonic tradition. This means that it was seen by ancient readers to

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[74] This is also the Straussian take on Schmitt's invocation of "animal powers," see his commentary on Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* U. Chicago 2007; again, one need not agree with the statements made here from a moral point of view, and in fact I do not agree with them as an interpretation of Nietzsche; but it is a good illustration of what a reader of Plato—Strauss in this sense, but also Bloom—would have to say about the dangers of the "overt" defense of the prerequisites for philosophy as is found in e.g., Callicles. Calliclean vitalism leads, if not to violent tyranny, then at least to egalitarian Last-Man-type lassitude. To what extent Plato himself might have agreed with both these claims can't fully be determined, but that he labored to "hide" the roots and character of philosophy for political purposes and claimed a "salutary" face or mask for the philosopher seems very likely.

[75] In keeping with the pattern of the last section, all citations in brackets in this section are line number from *Hippias Major*

have sufficient similarity to the rest of the Platonic corpus as to be authentic. If indeed it was written by someone other than Plato, then its educational purposes *to us* may be greater than if it were written by Plato himself because it may be therefore a simpler and less nuanced Plato. But this is a good thing, especially in a dialogue about rhetoric and the political uses of rhetoric. It means that this dialogue represents in a more or less *obvious* way, the Platonic view of rhetoric and its political power: that is, it may be "ersatz Plato," and therefore easier for a modern reader to understand "Plato's intention" as ancient readers and Platonists understood it. From the point of view of this thesis, having such information would be *more* valuable than what we could gain from reading Plato's work alone.

The beginning of the *Hippias Major* is important and will immediately resonate with the reader, who will kindly recall what was said above regarding the status of "pre-Socratic" philosophy with respect to the city and politics:

Socrates
Hippias, beautiful and wise, what a long time it is since you have put in at the port of Athens!

Hippias
I am too busy, Socrates. For whenever Elis needs to have any business transacted with any of the states, she always comes to me first of her citizens and chooses me as envoy, thinking that I am the ablest judge and messenger of the words that are spoken by the several states. [281b] So I have often gone as envoy to other states, but most often and concerning the most numerous and important matters to Lacedaemon. For that reason, then, since you ask me, I do not often come to this neighborhood.

Socrates
That's what it is, Hippias, to be a truly wise and perfect man! For you are both in your private capacity able to earn much money from the young [281c] and to confer upon them still greater benefits than you receive, and in public affairs you are able to benefit your own state, as a man must who is to be not despised but held in high repute among the many. **And yet, Hippias, what in the world is the reason why those men of old whose names are called great in respect to wisdom—Pittacus, and Bias, and the Milesian Thales with his followers and also the later ones, down to Anaxagoras, are all, [281d] or most of them, found to refrain from affairs of state?**

Hippias
What else do you suppose, Socrates, than that they were not able to compass by their wisdom both public and private matters?

Socrates
Then for Heaven's sake, just as the other arts have progressed, and the ancients are of no account in comparison with the artisans of today, shall we say that your art also has progressed and those of the ancients who were concerned with wisdom are of no account in comparison with you?

Hippias
Yes, you are quite right.

Now, it is true that in one sense the *Hippias Major* is a dialogue strictly about the beautiful: the word *kalon* outnumbers every other word of substance in the text, and even most prepositions, pronouns, and articles; and the discussion of the beautiful occurs at the very center of the text. But more than the first fifth of the text is concerned with political matters, and political considerations reappear even in the middle of the theoretical discussion of the *kalon*. In particular the way the dialogue enters into this discussion of the *kalon* is very interesting.

Hippias thinks he is a maker of beautiful public speeches. The discussion of the *kalon* in the *Hippias Major* occurs well into the text,after Hippias mentions the beautiful speech he has just prepared—for public rendition in Sparta and Athens—regarding the proper education of young men. [286a] In responding to this claim, Socrates makes us understand that his confusion over the nature of the *kalon* is rooted in his own consideration of beautiful and ugly speeches. The theoretical discussion on the *kalon* for which this dialogue is most famous then follows. [286e ff.] But Hippias' last statement in the dialogue, after the theoretical discussion on the nature of the *kalon* has ended, is that Socrates' questions all amount to "mere shavings and scrapings of discourse," and that what is truly beautiful is the ability to make beautiful speeches in public for one's own interest or advancement: in other

words that Socrates' speeches are ugly, but that traditional political rhetoric is what is truly beautiful. [304a] Socrates' speeches are ugly and politically powerless, but rhetoric is beautiful and powerful. The theoretical discussion of the *kalon* in the *Hippias Major* is therefore framed by the *kalon* as it is found in political rhetoric.

Accordingly, Hippias, echoing Gorgias at *Gorg.* 452d, and especially Callicles at 491e-2c from the *Gorgias* (as well as Meno, Gorgias' student, from *Meno* 73c), defines the beautiful as having power in political affairs and one's own state. [296a] Hippias is both the typical orator and sophist, wanting power through rhetoric in public life, and pay in private for the teaching of virtue. The first and central issue of the introduction is the relationship of the wise man to political life: it is presented as a contrast between the older generations of wise men, who stayed away from matters of state, did not speak to the public and did not exact money for wisdom in private; and Hippias' generation, who do speak to the public and ask money to teach virtue. Of which kind is Socrates?

The discussion on the *kalon* that follows the political introduction consists of various claims as to what may be the *kalon* itself, all of which are refuted. Not all of these claims interest us, but many are considered in the same words that we have seen before: the beautiful as the useful [*khreston*] or the beneficial [*ophelimon*] as at *Gorgias* 474e and *Republic* 401c-d; the beautiful as that which is pleasant, as in *Gorgias* 474e, and in particular pleasant through the eyes and ears, as in *Republic* 401c. But all of these claims are rejected as somehow incomplete or self-contradictory. As it is the political dimension that interests us here, we will not consider the arguments by which these claims are refuted, but merely add again that

these are claims Socrates endorses in the two other texts named, i.e. in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*—claims with specifically political import in political contexts. Why does Socrates refute definitions of the *kalon* in the *Hippias* that are used to great political effect in the *Gorgias* and *Republic*?[76]

For it is clear that the *kalon* is not used for any straightforward "substantial" political purpose in the *Hippias Major.* It is said at one point [295d] that laws [*nomoi*] and practices [*epitedeumata*] may be beautiful—the same pairing in the *Gorgias* at 474e. But unlike the treatment of beautiful laws and practices in the *Gorgias,* the treatment of this political issue within the discussion of the *kalon* is very obscure. Socrates asks Hippias to consider if perhaps the *kalon* of laws and practices is not the aesthetic pleasure through the eyes and ears. [298d] This last puzzling possibility is refuted as well, which allows Hippias to make his final definition of the *kalon* in terms of political rhetoric. This is the definition of the *kalon* with which we first encounter in the *Hippias* at 286a, and this is the definition with which we leave the dialogue as well.

It is this last point then that may provide the key to deciphering the relationship between the *kalon* and the political in the *Hippias Major.* Given the strange obscurity of the overt theoretical or "substantial" link between the *kalon* and the political in this text, we should focus on what may be the clearer "dramatic" relationship between the two and see if this throws any light on our concern.

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[76] In the *Republic* the *kalon* is at the center of the "pre-rational" (pre-speech) education of the *erromenesteroi* who will become guardians of the philosophical state. In the *Gorgias* Socrates attempts (with much less success) to use the *kalon* to teach Callicles that licentiousness is ugly and lawfulness is "beautiful." Much of the discussion in the *Hippias Major* is also overtly (and I would add hypocritically) concerned with refuting the notion that the *kalon* or the noble/beautiful could in any way include licentiousness (*akolasia*), which is the prerequisite for tyranny (but also for philosophy).

Hippias is an orator who believes he rules in public life through beautiful speeches and that he can teach beautiful virtue to the young through beautiful speeches. In showing his ignorance, and more, his total helplessness with regard to this very point, to what the beautiful in fact really is, the *Hippias Major* seems at first sight to take the wind out of the orators' claims to political power through beautiful speech and their right to teach the young the beautiful or noble pursuits in private for pay. Socrates uses the beautiful to expose Hippias' total lack of political acumen: not only is he not able to tell what makes the laws and practices beautiful, but he is used as an old woman by the Spartans, [285e] whom he can only please, but not teach or rule. Like the rhetoric at *Gorgias* 464b-466a, Hippias' rhetoric only aims to please and therefore has to cater to the pleasures of others. Hippias is a man who knows nothing of what is beautiful by nature, but instead slavishly memorizes names to please others with old wives' tales. He thinks he rules, but he is really being used as a clown.

As much truth as there may be to this view, it is not a complete or satisfying view; strictly speaking the refutation of Hippias explodes his claims to *knowledge.* But is he in fact powerless? Is Socrates' reference to Hippias' competence, a claim that occurs at 304b in the last statement of the dialogue, merely ironic, or is Hippias actually powerful in his home city and in cities abroad after all? A closer consideration of the means Socrates uses to refute Hippias raises some troubling questions. Most importantly, Socrates uses what has been called an "alter ego" to drive his discussion with Hippias. This is a literary device that is unique to the

*Hippias Major* and that Plato uses nowhere else.[77] This device of the alter ego has reasonably been interpreted as a rhetorical means to flatter Hippias' status and pride: a vain Hippias could not endure a Socrates asking him such questions in the open.[78] This is of course true, but not complete. For in using an alter ego, Socrates sets himself up as *very* different from the alter ego. He does not merely speak for the alter ego, but sets himself against the alter ego, and argues against him. [298d-e] Where the alter ego is a rough man, base, ugly, impious, violent [293a, 288d-9e, 292a] who cares only for the truth [288d, 298d-e], the Socrates we see is more beautiful and gentle—and clearly does *not* care only for the truth. He also cares about luring Hippias into continuing the conversation by appealing to his vanity and to his notions of gentlemanly or noble propriety. [292c] In using the alter ego as a rhetorical device Socrates shows himself as devious and careful of conventional notions [298e-299d], even deferential to conventional notions, in a way that his alter ego is not. His alter ego cares only about nature, not convention.

The difference between Socrates and his "alter ego" reaches the peak of its significance in the very last passage of the text. In responding to Hippias' final definition of the beautiful as political rhetoric, Socrates does not refute it. Rather he says that he has been convinced of this definition numerous times, but that his "alter ego" always *reviles* him *in private* for it. Socrates is reviled by *both* men like Hippias and men like the "alter ego": he has benefited from his conversation with *both* Hippias and the "alter ego." And in comparing this statement with the introduction 281-283, the supposition forces itself on us: could the alter ego represent the old

[77] A very limited exception may occur in the Theaetetus
[78] Tarrant, p. 110-1 comments on Woodruff's view as found in Vander Waerdt 1994

philosophy from the introduction as the opposite to Hippias' new public philosophy? Could it be then that the "alter ego," always refuting, ugly, base, hitting people with a big stick, is Socrates as a pre-Socratic, Socrates still a student of Anaxagoras [281c, 283a], the student of physics, the Aristophantic image of Socrates, on account of which Socrates was accused at his trial?[79] Is he Socrates as a "pre-Socratic," or pre-Platonic, Socrates who only cares for the naked truth and who has no respect for the opinions of convention, but only for nature? [298d-e ff.] In his impious, violent and boorish discussion of the *kalon,* is the ugly alter ego the old pre-Socratic philosopher who is ignorant of the great power and uses of the *kalon?* It is only *in private* that the real Socrates—the rude, wild "alter ego" who cares about nothing but truth and nature—makes his appearance and can hector the new, public mask of Socrates.

Socratic rhetoric is never simply rhetoric as such, but rhetoric that also points to the truth.[80] It is possible that Socrates' flattery of Hippias is not *merely* ironic or rhetorical but points to something perhaps true: that Socrates maybe really thinks he can learn something from Hippias—it is Socrates who starts the dialogue and Socrates who restrains Hippias a number of times when the sophist wants to leave. [292c, 295a, etc.] Perhaps Socrates is not merely being ironic at the end when he tells Hippias that he has benefited from the discussion. The surface Socrates is

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[79] See Tarrant p. 126 of Vander Waerdt 1994, "The historical Socrates was not more mild than was his alter ego in the *Hippias major.*" Tarrant's view that the "alter ego" is more than just a rhetorical device is in my opinion correct and very insightful; but Tarrant completely ignores the political aspect of the dialogue and therefore possibly does not discuss the real significance of this device.
[80] Compare *Gorgias* 527c to the end of the *Phaedrus.*

perhaps something in between the wise men of old times—the original pre-Socratic philosophers—who kept out of public affairs and only cared about truth or nature, and men like Hippias who are determined by their public lives and know nothing of the truth apart from convention—but who nevertheless know something about how to manipulate the cities through their knowledge of convention.[81] Is the surface Socrates the new "beautiful" public face of the old philosophy? He is certainly not, like Hippias, a sophist whose mind is determined by the *polis* and whose desires are determined by money. [283b] But would it be plausible to interpret the more beautiful surface Socrates, the Platonic Socrates, as the pre-Socratic philosopher become political—and not only political, but, unlike Callicles and the brutal Critias, also politically *astute*—the old philosopher with a political surface, with a politic face or mask, with knowledge of real rhetoric? Where the old philosophy, as represented in the alter ego, only refutes and shows the hopeless limitations and contradictions in the conventional or plausible notions of the *kalon*—and thereby even comes close to considering the *kalon* as a matter of human convention with no basis in nature—the new *political* philosophy, informed by men like Hippias, the new Platonic Socrates, uses these very notions[82] in the *Gorgias* and especially the *Republic* to reform the education of the cities and to give the philosopher the title to the best life and the supreme justice: and if not the absolute political rule in the city, then at least *the spiritual rule.* Where the former philosophy was private and

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[81] Hippias continually judges the strength of a claim by its possible appeal to others or the many, e.g., 292e

[82] Namely the *kalon* as the *ophelimon,* the *khreston,* the pleasant through eyes, etc., all of which were shown empty or incomplete in the *Hippias Major* not by Socrates proper but by the "alter ego" Socrates, who cares only for the truth and nothing else.

politically weak and did not know rhetoric, the new philosophy is informed by the "beauty" and power of political rhetoric, is public and ambitious, it has benefited from an encounter with men like Hippias:

HIPPIAS: Decidedly. Now other things, Socrates, testify for us that this is so, but especially political affairs: for in political affairs and in one's own state to be powerful is the most beautiful of all things, but to be powerless is the most disgraceful of all.
SOCRATES: Good! Then, for Heaven's sake, Hippias, is wisdom also for this reason the most beautiful of all things and ignorance the most disgraceful of all things? —*Hippias Major,* 296a

*IV. Summary of this Chapter and Some Additional Circumstantial Evidence from Antiquity Regarding the Platonic and Philosophical Association with Tyranny—*

In conclusion, to summarize the argument and different sections of this chapter: first, that it is obvious from the smaller apologetic dialogues and works of Plato and of Xenophon that *the charge of teaching tyranny* was a special concern of Socrates' defenders, and that this implies this accusation against philosophy was the most important; and that their refutation of this charge is weak and unconvincing—based on the claim that Socrates did not teach anything, and that he is unskilled at rhetoric.[83] Second, that the most thoroughgoing effort to show Socrates both did not teach tyranny and also condemned rhetoric is to be found in the *Gorgias;* but that a close reading of this dialogue leaves us with ambiguous feelings at best about Socrates' sincerity, and, in my opinion, a near certainty that he in fact does agree with Callicles on the fundamental political problems. He agrees with Callicles *both*

[83] For this latter see also the patently ridiculous opening of the *Apology,* which directly contradicts the entirety of the *Phaedrus* and some of the other dialogues mentioned above.

that the fundamental problem is the salvation of the superior specimen—the *erromenesteros,* a term that connotes biological vitality and breeding[84]—from the clutches of *nomos* and also that achieving rule in the cities is the ultimate means to this salvation. Insofar as he disagrees with Callicles or refutes him, Socrates only does this by showing that he himself is far more liberated from convention, far wilder, far more prone to consider "the way of force" and of physical violence—i.e., he outdoes Callicles in his "tyrannical" political orientation and he outdoes Callicles in "vulgar" or "shameful" rhetoric. Socrates refines and elaborates only Callicles' *means* of saving philosophy and "saving nature": Callicles is politically naïve because he sees only *nomos* but does not understand the regime, the *politeia* which unites *nomos* with physical force and through which *nomos* becomes actualized. Socrates seems to suggest, from a comparison of the *Gorgias* with the "sister" dialogue on rhetoric *Phaedrus,* and other minor dialogues, that the true means to achieve Callicles' tyrannical ends is through a revised understanding of rhetoric. *Contra* Callicles, who represents possibly the political thought of pre-Socratic philosophy—philosophy when it *first* turns to its own self-defense and embraces tyranny as the only salvation in an emergency situation—Socrates recommends the practice of a new kind of oratory instead, which will both allow the philosopher to remain philosopher and, in the long run, give him spiritual dominion in the cities. In the

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[84] Recall also the obvious fact from *Republic* that the *erromenesteros* is *bred,* that the philosopher is first and foremost a product of breeding; the state begins to wither when the breeding project collapses. As this is not a thesis specifically on breeding in Plato and in classical political philosophy, this very significant fact must only be mentioned in passing here. Nevertheless, it carries some weight in my argument, since it reminds one yet again that the fundamental precondition for philosophy is *breeding,* i.e., *phusis,* nature, understood, as we have seen, first of all as biological breeding. And that the end-product of this breeding, nature itself, is the *erromenesteros:* the word that Socrates uses uniquely for both the "raw material" of the philosopher and the tyrant.

*Hippias Major* we see this same argument or image from a different point of view, as the "pre-Platonic" philosophy, violent, wild, and crude, learns from orators like Hippias how to hide its true character and also achieve power in the city. And the philosopher will do so while blaming men like Hippias as sophists and opportunists and presenting the philosophers as defenders of common justice, decency, and restraint. We see in this dialogue the philosopher putting on his "priestly" *mask.*

It is useful to mention now in passing that the double view here expressed, that Platonic political philosophy is deceitful or "hypocritical" and that it *tends to tyranny* or to associations with tyranny, is by no means my own innovation or invention, but was common knowledge in the ancient world. We have already seen how, fifty years after Socrates' execution, and despite Plato's efforts, the Athenian people still understood the Socratic school as fundamentally prone to tyranny, lawlessness, licentiousness and to violent repression of democracy.[85] Besides this, we also have rather overt testimony from some of the lesser-known disciples of Socrates that there exists an association between philosophy and tyranny. The views of Socrates' "other" students are useful because men like Aristippus were Socratics without being Platonists—that is, they either did not care to, or did not know how to, dissimulate as well as Plato did. For example if we look at some of the sayings of Aristippus, student of Socrates, consort of tyrants, and the founder of the

[85] See above references to Aeschines' *Against Timarchus;* I did not make the connection to licentiousness at the time, but the charges against Timarchus, in which he is compared to Socrates, are most significant, as is the generally lawless and tyrannical image presented of Timarchus. Timarchus is also said to be defended by "old [aristocratic] generals" who speak in high-flown language about philosophy and pederasty.

hedonist school from Cyrene, we will not fail to see the "political teaching" to nature that I have discussed so far, expressed in a rather frank way:

> At another time he was asked what advantage philosophers had over other men; and he replied, "If all the laws should be abrogated, we should still live in the same manner as we do now."
>
> Being asked once what advantage he had derived from philosophy, he said, "The power of associating confidently with everybody."[86]

Strange things indeed, from the "traditional" point of view, to claim as *the* chief advantages and *the* chief teachings of philosophy, strange things to have learned from Socrates. Aristippus is a Socratic, but he is not Platonic; that is, he does not take part in the Platonic project alluded to above, and therefore his attitude does not come down to us through the obscuring or beautifying filter of a masterful oratory. Aristippus openly associated with tyrants and was famous for having made his career and fortune in association with tyrants. The advantages he speaks of above reflect, for sure, his answers to non-philosophers, and therefore reflect only the "external" advantages of philosophy: but it is precisely the orientation of philosophy toward other men and toward the *polis* in particular that is the issue here; for it matters little to the cities if philosophy directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, lets loose desires, orientations and abilities that reach for usurpation, treason, and tyranny. The connection between the sayings of Aristippus and Plutarch's famous statement about the tyrant-pretending Alcibiades, also a student of Socrates, should be clear:

> One colour, indeed, they say the chameleon cannot assume: it cannot itself appear white; but Alcibiades, whether with good men or with bad, could adapt himself to his company, and equally wear the appearance of virtue or vice. At Sparta, he was devoted to athletic exercises, was frugal and

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[86] Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Aristippus* ch. IV

reserved; in Ionia, luxurious, gay, and indolent; in Thrace, always drinking; in Thessaly, ever on horseback; and when he lived with Tisaphernes the Persian satrap, he exceeded the Persians themselves in magnificence and pomp...[87]

This is most significant should one summarily consider the similarities of Aristippus' career—his association with tyrants—with Alcibiades'. Now Aristippus is a full-blown philosopher, and not, like Alcibiades, a statesman who aspired to tyranny directly. Yet what binds the two, and indeed the distinguishing characteristic of the two, is their versatility, their "regime-independence" and "*nomos*-independence," their ability to associate with all men in all regimes, which all of course must presuppose a radical unmooring from their native regime and its conventions, and a corresponding ability to *manipulate* and *seduce* conventions or regimes of different kinds. This is what they learned from the wild man, Socrates. Indeed Aristippus openly admits what I have claimed so far: that philosophy, so far from being a "civilizing" education, is a form of de-civilization and "re-barbarization," a "return to the wild," to the "teaching of Cheiron," an escape from the *taming* morality of *nomos*:

He was asked once in what educated men are superior to uneducated men; and answered, "Just as broken horses are superior to those that are unbroken."[88]

Philosophy is liberation from *nomos* and return to nature and therefore to the "teaching of force," the teaching of the beast—the lion and the fox—which is "regime-independent." The advantage of the philosophers over other men, and the advantages philosophy supplies, are, according to Aristippus' statements, in fact

[87] Plutarch *Life of Alcibiades* 23.4-6
[88] Diogenes *Life of Aristippus*

shared to the full by Alcibiades, the pretender to tyranny, if not exemplified by him. It is in this very direct sense that philosophy and tyranny are uniquely related, in their common and unique orientation versus the political regime or political life in general, and in the fact that Plato, and possibly Socrates, could teach his students special skills for manipulating convention and manipulating regimes. From the point of view of the classical regime, indeed from the point of view of any particular or sovereign regime and therefore, from the point of view of political life as such, this orientation is treasonous and dangerous, it is tyrannical. Accordingly we see throughout antiquity casual references to the licentiousness, the love of luxury, the *violence,* and the *turn to tyranny* that not only Socratics like Aristippus exemplified, but indeed also the Academics, i.e., Plato's own intellectual progeny. So that, much later, Athenaeus, who otherwise is concerned with attacking Aristippus' hedonism, adds about the Academics themselves:

> For Euphraeus, when he was staying with king Perdiccas in Macedonia, was not less a king than the other, being a man of a depraved and calumnious disposition, who managed all the companionship of the king in so cold a manner, that no one was allowed to share in the king's meals unless he knew something about geometry or philosophy; on which account, after Philippus obtained the government, Parmenion, having caught him in Oreus, put him to death; as Carystius relates in his Historical Commentaries. And Callippus the Athenian, who was himself a pupil of Plato, having been a companion and fellow-pupil of Dion, and having travelled with him to Syracuse, when he saw that Dion was attempting to make himself master of the kingdom, slew him; and afterwards, attempting to usurp the supreme power himself, was slain too. And Euagon of Lampsacus (as Eurypylus says, and Dicaeocles of Cnidus, in the ninety-first book of his Commentaries, and also Democharés the orator, in his argument in defence of Sophocles, against Philon) lent his native city money and took its Acropolis as security. Afterwards, being unable to recover the money, he attempted to seize on the tyranny, until the Lampsacenes attacked him, and repaid him the money, and drove him out of the city. And Timaeus of Cyzicus (as the same Democharés relates), having given largesses of money and corn to his fellow-citizens, and being on this account believed by the Cyzicenes to be an excellent man, after having waited a little time, attempted to overturn the constitution with the assistance of Aridaeus; and being brought to trial and convicted, and branded with infamy, he remained in the city to an extreme old age, being always, however, considered dishonoured and infamous.
>
> **And such now are some of the Academics, who live in a scandalous and infamous manner. For they, having by impious and unnatural means acquired vast wealth by trickery, are at present highly thought of; as Chaeron of Pellene, who was not only a pupil of Plato, but of Xenocrates also. And he too, having usurped the supreme power in his country, and having exercised it with great severity,** not only banished the most virtuous men in the city, but also gave the property

of the masters to their slaves, and gave their wives also to them, compelling them to receive them as their husbands; having got all these admirable ideas from that excellent *Republic* and those illegal *Laws* of Plato.[89]

These are accusations made by an enemy of the Academics and therefore ought to be taken with a grain of salt; but the wealth of sources Athenaeus quotes, in addition to what we have considered so far, makes it likely that at least some of the accusations are true, or at the very least that *the people thought them to be true.* The reputation of Plato in antiquity was nowhere near so "pure" as it is in our time.

In fact the personal lives or careers of Plato and Xenophon themselves also bear out my main claim, at least as partial demonstrations. I will not embark here on speculations about Plato's dealings in Syracuse, as this subject has been treated extensively elsewhere, but will make only a single observation. Plato's adventures in Syracuse indicate the connection between tyranny and philosophy not directly, that is, not in the crude sense that the regime he had intercourse with was tyrannical. It is rather the very fact that Plato would leave his native state in an attempt to pursue his advantage and to improve another, that betrays the connection I speak of here. In the case of Xenophon we have an even clearer illustration of the corruption philosophy will work on the souls of the best, that is, if by this we mean corruption considered from the point of view of the city:

Xenophon seems to indicate by the plan of the *Memorabilia* that Socrates attached a greater importance to self than to the city. This is in accordance with Xenophon's distinction between the man of excellence and the benefactor of his fellow citizens. Xenophon himself was induced to accompany Cyrus, an old enemy of Athens, on his expedition against his brother by the promise of Proxenus, an old guest-friend of his, that he would make him a friend of Cyrus if he would come. Proxenus, a pupil of Gorgias, of a man who had no fixed domicile in any city, explicitly stated that he

[89] Athenaeus *Deipnosophists* 11.119

himself considered Cyrus worth more to him than his fatherland. Xenophon does not say in so many words that he might conceivably come to consider Cyrus' friendship preferable to his fatherland; but he certainly was not shocked by Proxenus' statement, and he certainly acted as if he were capable of sharing Proxenus' sentiment. Socrates had some misgivings about Xenophon's becoming a friend of Cyrus and he advised him therefore to consult Apollo about the journey; but Xenophon was so anxious to join Cyrus or to leave his fatherland that he decided at once to accept Proxenus' invitation. Even after everything had gone wrong with Cyrus' expedition, Xenophon was not anxious to return to his fatherland, although he was not yet exiled. If his comrades had not passionately protested, he would have founded a city "in some barbarian place"; not Xenophon, but his opponents, felt that one ought not to esteem anything more highly than Greece. Later on, he did not hesitate to accompany Agesilaus on his campaign against [his native] Athens and her allies which culminated in the battle of Coronea.[90]

The similarity between this career and what Plutarch said above of Alcibiades', is too obvious to comment on. There is difference only in the form of public expression. But the basic heartlessness and tyrannical nature of these examples, all consequences of the teaching on nature or the fundamental philosophical orientation, is evident if we should take seriously the horizon of the political regime, and adopt its point of view for our own. We must do this at least for a moment, at least to gain a proper understanding of the original and pre-philosophic political orientation. According to this orientation, this kind of "cosmopolitanism" and return to nature is not just treason, but it is cruelty and tyranny.

*In fine,* I close both this section and this chapter with yet another accusation against Plato and the Platonists, this time coming from another philosopher—from Epicurus—who, in his mockery, attacks the Academics both for their tyrannical drive and for their deceitful rhetoric, the two elements I have tried to explain here throughout:

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[90] Strauss OT 101-2

How malicious philosophers can be! I know nothing more venomous than the joke which Epicurus permitted himself against Plato and the Platonists: he called them *Dionysio-kolakes.* The literal meaning of that, what stands in the foreground, is "flatterers of Dionysius," hence accessories of tyrants and lickspittles. But the phrase says still more than that—"they are all *actors*, with nothing true about them" (for *Dionysokolax* was a popular description of an actor). And that last part is the real maliciousness which Epicurus hurled against Plato: the magnificent manners which Plato, along with his pupils, understood, the way they stole the limelight—things Epicurus did not understand!—that irritated him, the old schoolmaster from Samos, who sat hidden in his little garden in Athens and wrote three hundred books—who knows?—perhaps out of rage and ambition against Plato?—It took a hundred years until Greece came to realize who this garden god Epicurus was.—Did they realize?[91]

This is the Epicurean criticism of Plato as relayed by Nietzsche.[92] The Platonists were both tyrant's lickspittles and also masters of oratory, hypocrites, pretenders, *actors.* In the Platonic corpus we see both the fundamental connection between philosophy and tyranny on one hand, and the concealment of this original identity on the other. Both appear together as "political philosophy," as a refinement of Callicles' antinomianism and drive to tyranny and violent atheism, in which these are covered up by a pose and mask of piety, justice, asceticism. *Nature*—the fundamental ground on which both tyranny and philosophy meet—is concealed, not from the philosophers themselves, but beneath the public mask of philosophy, which henceforth becomes a pose of piety, of righteousness, which henceforth becomes *moralistic.* It is through this rhetoric that Platonic philosophy becomes tyrannical—quite literally. The rival Epicurean school, by contrast, which did not have this knowledge or means of self-defense, fell into disrepute as nihilistic atheism, and Plato is said to have taken efforts to burn Democritus' scientific books.[93]

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[91] BGE 7

[92] The original source may be apocryphal, but, as I explained above not only does this not matter, but if Epicurus is only "believed" to have said this, it makes the argument here *stronger.*

[93] Diogenes Laertius *Life of Democritus* 40

In Plato we have both the salvation of philosophy from persecution and its "concealment" under a political mask, its coming forth into the world under the mask of the moralist and the "priest," under the mask of the "good man." As someone else said, the Platonic project—both for the masking of philosophy and, through this masking, for its "rule in the cities," for its attainment of the ultimate power—has been "all too successful." Nietzsche relays Epicurus' sarcastic mockery of Platonism and the Platonic project at its very beginnings for very good reason: for, as we will see in the next chapter, it is Nietzsche himself who, in modern times, faced by emergency—no, by imminent catastrophe—felt the need to criticize and overturn the entire Platonic project and re-expose, as it were, the origins of philosophy in something more fundamental, in an ancient understanding of nature. This same Platonic project, of which I have offered a brief study in this chapter, had become "too successful" and threatened to extinguish not only philosophy, but the cultural preconditions of philosophy, and therefore the possibility of philosophy itself. The time was needful to expose the pre-philosophical roots of philosophy, to expose the original meaning of "nature" as the cultivation of blood and breeding, in which philosophy and tyranny share a kinship or a twinship. It is in this sense that Nietzsche's vitalism and his "Calliclean" language must be understood; the modern Nietzschean argument, which strips away exoteric Platonic rhetoric and *mise-en-scene,* to show the identity between tyranny and philosophy, is ultimately at its source an attempt to revitalize philosophy itself, an attempt to which I now turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: NIETZSCHE ON THE ORIGIN OF PHILOSOPHY AND TYRANNY IN THE DECAY OF ARISTOCRATIC REGIMES

### *I. Introduction—Nietzsche's Fundamental Concern; Nietzsche's Rhetoric and Esotericism*

In Nietzsche[1] appears the most direct, explicit and clearest exposition of my main argument in this thesis, namely that philosophy and tyranny are in some sense deeply connected, perhaps identical at their origins. There is a historical process through which Nietzsche reveals this connection to the reader, a sort of "natural history of morals."[2] The decline or decay of a type of aristocracy allows for the "distillation," the abstraction, or the "radicalization" of the aristocratic ethos, of the principle underlying aristocratic life—which, as has been argued in the previous chapters, is to be reduced to the classical standard of *nature*. This radicalization results in the tyrant and the philosopher as twin or complementary types. The appearance of philosophers, and the birth of philosophy itself in the sense of the intensity of the philosophical way of life, is historically not separable from the production of potential tyrants. According to Nietzsche these represent, to put it provisionally, the aristocratic type as unmoored from the strictures of aristocratic morality, from attachment to any particular historical regime.

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[1] All citations in this chapter where the author is not specified are to be assumed to be Nietzsche; see list of abbreviations and the bibliography for a list of editions and translations used.

[2] The title of a chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil* where the most telling connection is made between aristocracy as the prerequisite both of tyranny and of high culture, and where both are connected to the problem of a decaying aristocracy, see below.

The ultimate origin of this identity is in what Nietzsche calls high culture, and which might be understood literally as the cultivation of human nature, a cultivation that is by necessity of long duration, strict, and difficult; a cultivation that might also go by the name of "regime." As such the question of philosophy and of high culture in Nietzsche is not entirely to be separated from the Platonic political problem *par excellence,* the problem of the classical regime. And it is in Nietzsche also that, according to more than one careful reader, the most comprehensive criticism of the Platonic political project is to be found. Nietzsche interprets the Platonic project to be at once a radicalization—an abstraction—and a distortion of the aristocratic project as embodied in the *polis*: the regime of the ancient city state with its intense, generations-long program of promoting *arête* or *virtu* through both breeding and training. Much attention has been paid to the Nietzschean criticism of Plato or of the Platonic project; less so to the fact that Nietzsche himself is likely better understood as a reformer of this project, which in the end amounts to nothing else but the revival and preservation of philosophy as a way of life.

According to Nietzsche the long-cultivated energies unleashed, and the "tropical" proliferation of human types made possible by, the political *weakness* and social turmoil that take place during the decline of a particular type of aristocracy allows for the emergence of the "genius of culture," which Nietzsche also tellingly elsewhere calls the *Gewaltmensch der Kultur,* the violent man of culture.[3] Nietzsche's acceptance of the label of "aristocratic radicalism" as an apt description of his own

[3] If this should remind one of the root of the Platonic *erromenesteros* in *rhonnumi,* the vigorous or well-born as a man of *vehement* nature or violent force—which Plato uses at Rep. 491a ff. to describe the nature of one who would become either a philosopher or, if corrupted, a tyrant, then this is not a coincidence. It is possibly a literal German translation of the Platonic word.

doctrine is therefore important in the context of this thesis. Aristocratic radicalism, the radicalization of the aristocratic standard at the moment of the decline of a historical aristocracy, is the unique and necessary prerequisite of both tyranny and philosophy, as it is the prerequisite of high culture generally—the philosopher being "the crown of culture." For Nietzsche, as we will see, the cause of high culture is not separable from the cause of philosophy.

It is important to emphasize in all that follows that Nietzsche's *chief* lifelong task and concern is not politics, morality, the well-being of this or that community or people, the well-being of the abstraction "the individual," or anything else of the sort: Nietzsche's chief concern, insofar as his public or political teaching is concerned, is the preservation or resurrection of philosophy. This can be demonstrated in many different ways, direct and indirect, from his published writings as well as his notes and letters. A few telling examples should suffice.

Consider first Nietzsche's early essay "Schopenhauer as Educator." Nietzsche is often perceived as a hostile critic of Schopenhauer. It is true that Nietzsche at one point refers to the substance of Schopenhauer's teaching as the "greatest psychological counterfeit" in history; and that he makes many similar criticisms regarding Schopenhauer's moral interpretation of the world. It is therefore all the more revealing that, precisely when it comes to a thinker with whom he disagrees so completely, he should have devoted an early essay to him in the course of which Schopenhauer is praised as the revival of a "truly ancient" and truly classical model of the philosophical life. There is much in this essay, which is dedicated

fundamentally to understanding the philosophical life and Schopenhauer as a model of this life—there is much here that gives an important clue about how we should read Nietzsche in general and understand his intention in general. For example, Nietzsche emphasizes courage or in fact quite literally *manliness, andreia,* as *the* most necessary quality for the philosopher to possess before all others, as the indispensible prerequisite for the philosophical way of life. Then also, in discussing this "resurrection" of an ancient or classical understanding of philosophy, Nietzsche goes so far as to compare Schopenhauer to Napoleon, another "classical man" who appeared, as he says, as an untimely and *unexpected* comet or meteor, totally out of place in an age of modern men and mediocrity. That is, precisely in an essay devoted to trying to understand the philosophical life and praise the philosophical life, we see Nietzsche at his most "stereotypically Nietzschean": on one hand he mentions uncompromising manliness, on the other he starts talking about Napoleon. But Nietzsche's concern is not manliness as such or Napoleon as such, nor assertion; it is philosophy.

If Nietzsche had made a statement about Napoleon alone, the reader could perhaps be safe to dismiss it as more Nietzschean "great man worship" or rhetoric against modern democracy. But, leaving aside the fact—pointed out already by Kaufmann among others—that Nietzsche is not in general interested in extolling the likes of Genghis Khan, Agathocles of Syracuse,[4] let alone the *machtpolitik* of imperial

[4] Even in terms as qualified as Machiavelli's; Nietzsche simply has no interest in power politics for the sake of politics.

Germany of his time, of which he is instead quite critical[5]; leaving all this aside, the reference to Napoleon is in an essay about a philosopher, Schopenhauer, not vice versa, and in the context of the resurrection of an ancient or classical understanding of *philosophy,* not manliness, and the prerequisites for philosophy. Nietzsche's admiration of Napoleon—who, it must be recalled, was not just a warlord but admired by and served as the inspiration for some of the greatest artists and literary minds of the 19th century[6]—should be understood as part of his concern with high culture and with philosophy. But conversely, the connection hinted at between Schopenhauer as the revival of classical philosophy and Napoleon as the revival of the classical statesman (or tyrant), gives a clue about what Nietzsche understands to be the ground or prerequisite of both high culture and philosophy. That is, one must look past the rhetoric of assertion, manliness, Napoleonic greatness, and try to tunnel into Nietzsche's statements to understand the riddle of why, precisely in the middle of talking about the resurrection of philosophy—his central concern—he

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[5] Especially telling in the context of this argument is his claim at TWI "What the Germans Lack," 4: "Even a rapid estimate shows that it is not only obvious that German culture is declining but that there is sufficient reason for that. In the end, no one can spend more than he has: that is true of an individual, it is true of a people. If one spends oneself for power, for power politics, for economics, world trade, parliamentarianism, and military interests — if one spends in the direction the quantum of understanding, seriousness, will, and self- overcoming which one represents, then it will be lacking for the other direction. Culture and the state — one should not deceive one-self about this — are antagonists: 'Kultur-Staat' is merely a modern idea. One lives off the other, one thrives at the expense of the other. All great ages of culture are ages of political decline: what is great culturally has always been unpolitical, even anti-political. Goethe's heart opened at the phenomenon of Napoleon — it closed at the 'Wars of Liberation.' At the same moment when Germany comes up as a great power, France gains a new importance as a cultural power. Even today much new seriousness, much new passion of the spirit, have migrated to Paris..."

[6] See Nietzsche on Napoleon at BGE 199 where he says that "the history of the effect of Napoleon is almost the history of the higher happiness which this entire century derived from its most valuable men and moments"; also on Goethe's opinion of Napoleon at TWI "What the Germans Lack" 4 and "Skirmishes" 49

should find it necessary to bring up the "brutal" language and subjects for which he is otherwise better known.

That Nietzsche's chief and lifelong concern is "high culture" or what he otherwise calls "the overall development" of mankind should not, in any case, be a controversial idea, since, again, he repeats it in a variety of ways in both published writings and letters. He says at one point that "the great, the uncanny problem *which I have been pursuing the longest*" is the problem of psychology of the "improvers" of mankind.[7] Nietzsche's ultimate concern, however, is not just high culture but *philosophy* as such.

In an early essay, "Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks," Nietzsche laments that philosophy in our own time has no home and no power: he connects the problem of philosophy with the problem of high culture in a direct and certain way that carries great weight for my own argument in this chapter—

> A period which suffers from a so-called high general level of liberal education but which is devoid of culture in the sense of a unity of style which characterizes all its life, will not quite know what to do with philosophy and wouldn't, if the Genius of Truth himself were to proclaim it in the streets and the market places. During such times philosophy remains the learned monologue of the lonely stroller, the accidental loot of the individual, the secret skeleton in the closet, or the harmless chatter between senile academics and children. No one may venture to fulfill philosophy's law with his own person, no one may live philosophically with that simple loyalty which compelled an ancient, no matter where he was or what he was doing, to deport himself as a Stoic if he once had pledged faith to the Stoa. All modern philosophizing is political, policed by governments, churches, academies, custom, fashion, and human cowardice, all of which limit it to a fake learnedness. Our philosophy stops with the sigh "If only ..." and with the insight "Once upon a time ..." Philosophy has no rights, and modern man, if he had any courage or conscience, should really repudiate it. He might ban it with words similar to those which Plato used to ban the tragic poets from his state, though reply could be made, just as the tragic poets might have made reply to Plato. If forced for once to speak out, philosophy might readily say, "Wretched people! Is it my fault if I am roaming the country among you like a cheap fortune-teller? If I must hide and disguise myself as though I were a fallen woman and you my judges? Just look at my sister, Art! Like me, she is in exile among barbarians. We no longer know what to do to save ourselves. True, here among you we have lost all our rights, but the judges who shall restore them to us shall judge you too. And to you they shall say: Go get yourselves a culture.

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[7] TWI "The 'Improvers' of Mankind" 5

Only then you will find out what philosophy can and will do."[8]

Nietzsche is consistent throughout his writings about this connection between high culture and philosophy; and therefore in what follows we would do well to keep in mind that when Nietzsche is talking about the prerequisites of high culture he is also talking about philosophy. Whether the case to be made for this connection is sound is beside the point, and possibly the subject of another book on Nietzsche; the only matter at hand is Nietzsche's understanding of the preconditions of philosophy, in particular the political preconditions as they relate to the main argument of this thesis. The case here to be made is that the preconditions for *tyranny* are identical or nearly identical, and that therefore a regime or a culture that cultivates philosophy *necessarily risks also the cultivation of tyranny*—the same claim that, in a previous chapter, I argued Plato also makes, albeit in a veiled and rather more restrained version than the one we find in Nietzsche.

The passage just quoted reveals an important and related element of Nietzsche's understanding of philosophy, which is that philosophy is a way of life. The understanding of philosophy as primarily a way of life, and not just a discipline of learning, let alone the substance of any one particular teaching or ideology, remains consistent throughout Nietzsche's writings. And so above we see that he complains that in his own time "no one may venture to fulfill philosophy's law with his own person, no one may live philosophically with that simple loyalty which compelled an ancient, no matter where he was or what he was doing, to deport

[8] *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* pp. 37-8

himself as a Stoic if he once had pledged faith to the Stoa." Elsewhere he repeats this same idea when he remarks that the great writer and dramatist Heinrich von Kleist committed suicide because of what he learned from Kant's philosophy; and that while this self-destruction of a great mind is to be lamented, it nevertheless indicates an intensity and seriousness regarding philosophy that doesn't exist in Nietzsche's own time: Kleist made Kant's philosophy his own and lived it. His greatness as an artist is arguably inseparable from this seriousness.

The great problem Nietzsche faces then, in talking about the preconditions of philosophy, is that he is in fact talking about the preconditions for a Kleist. If philosophy is not a mere discipline or sphere of learning, but the crown of high culture, and a way of life, the problem of the resurrection or salvation of philosophy becomes infinitely more difficult and more complicated. If the question is not one of the perpetuation of a philosophical school that already exists, but of the birth of philosophy itself, or its resurrection, the answer must turn on a study of the preconditions for the emergence of philosophy to begin with, on a study of Greek philosophy or the earliest philosophers. It is in this study, which includes Plato, that Nietzsche chances upon the complex of ideas that came to be called "aristocratic radicalism"—a description Georg Brandes coined for his thought, of which Nietzsche approved, and described as most clever.[9]

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[9] One of the first lecturers on Nietzsche, Georg Brandes at the University of Copenhagen, coined the phrase "aristocratic radicalism" as a way to describe his thought, which was then for the most part unknown to the world. In a letter to Brandes Nietzsche approves of this description, calling it the "cleverest" observation about himself. It is most appropriate that Brandes, who coined this clever and pregnant description of Nietzsche, should have been also the man through whom Nietzsche's name first began to be widely known. It is appropriate because when one looks at the totality of Brandes' own work, life and reputation, one sees maybe one of the proper ways of interpreting "aristocratic radicalism": Brandes simultaneously rejected modern politics and modern morality—

Does the fact that Nietzsche's chief and lifelong concerns are high culture, philosophy, the "overall development" of mankind and the psychology of those who attempted to "improve mankind"—does the fact that Nietzsche's concerns seem to be the intellect and the "arts of peace" mean then that we should read his more questionable and violent statements and images "metaphorically" or "spiritually"? Are Nietzsche's famously dangerous politics a "metaphor" for purely intellectual or spiritual matters? Some have read his books in this way. Faced with Nietzsche's brutality, with his shocking and reckless statements on democracy, aristocracy, his seeming praise of cruelty and vitalism, some have insisted these only have significance as a metaphor for internal or spiritual states; or that this is a form of literary irony.[10] There is some truth to each of these "schools" of interpreting Nietzsche, but in refusing to take him at his word, and in refusing to take his political

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which includes or included modern power politics, and the "noise" of petty nationalism—and embraced a concern for *the preconditions of high culture,* preconditions that Brandes explored especially in a series of biographies of great thinkers and artists. It is interesting to note that Brandes' chief concerns were later repeated in the careers of Stefan George and of his *GeorgeKreis.* Here we find a circle of avowed Nietzscheans centered around a poet, all devoted similarly to the elaboration of a new aristocratic ethos and perhaps the foundation of a new aristocracy. It is telling that, like Brandes, they interpreted this "aristocratic radicalism" as a concern with the preconditions of high culture, which, under the direction of Stefan George himself, they explored—much like Brandes had—through the composition of monumental biographies of great thinkers and leaders. Some of the best-known productions of this school are those of Ernst Kantorowicz on Frederick II Hohenstaufen and of Friedrich Gundolf on Caesar. See Lawrence Trite, "Plutarch in Germany: the Stefan George*Kreis*" *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* Winter 1995, Volume 1, Issue 3, pp 109-121, where the connection to Nietzsche and the composition of monumental biographies is explicitly made. Brandes had also himself written a similar biography of Caesar, surely inspired, as in the case of George and Gundolf, by Nietzsche's very striking words on Caesar and his relationship to high culture.

[10] On interpreting Nietzsche's "violent" language purely as spiritual metaphor see Walter Kaufmann *Nietzsche* Princeton 1975 especially chapters 2 and 10; on Nietzsche as "literary irony" or for an example of the "Nietzsche must have been joking" school of interpretation see Alexander Nehamas *Nietzsche: Life as Literature,* the title of which indicates the general approach taken; Nietzsche, however, certainly did like literature and he also occasionally joked. For a brief introduction to the postmodernist reading of Nietzsche (which also in large part ignores or dismisses his political thought) see *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra,* ed. Clayton Kalb 1990 SUNY

ideas seriously, much that is interesting is lost. The distinction that may lead to a more fruitful reading of Nietzsche is not between metaphorical or ironic on one hand and literal on the other, but between exoteric and esoteric. Nietzsche not only knew of this distinction but said it was part of the "uncanny problem" that he had been pursuing the longest.[11]

What would it mean then to read Nietzsche with attention to the distinction between esoteric and exoteric? And what does this have to do with his politics, and his intemperate rhetoric? When a thinker like Nietzsche, who makes use of this distinction between esoteric and exoteric writing, is said to have both a surface and a hidden meaning, this doesn't mean that the surface meaning is *merely* false or *merely* misleading or *mere* rhetoric. The exoteric meaning even in Plato is never *merely* rhetoric or mask. The exoteric program explains the public function of the philosopher whether as, in the case of the *Phaedo* and *Crito,* in his moral bearing, or otherwise, as in the *Laws* and elsewhere, in his public function as advisor to the lawgiver or as lawgiver himself. That is, whether or not the ultimate or esoteric meaning of this political program is the preservation of philosophy, the outward, immediate or exoteric meaning is still meant in earnest. It is precisely to make this outward teaching politically effective that is the heart of the matter, for only in so doing, and in reforming the soul of man, religion, and the constitutions of states, will philosophy, in the long run, be made "safe in the cities." To put it in Nietzschean terms, exotericism is a form of spiritual warfare. This is so even in a case like the Platonic political philosophy where, as has been argued in the previous chapters,

[11] TWI "On the Improvers of Mankind" 5

and as others have elsewhere made the case at greater length, the preconditions or elements of daily philosophical life, the "esoteric" meaning, may actually be *at odds* with the moral and political program openly or exoterically pushed for.[12] Nevertheless this latter is not mere deflection, but is still meant in earnest because its adoption by states or societies at large is what makes philosophers safe. These philosophers furthermore, themselves in their external discipline of sobriety, temperance, justice, piety, may also be at odds with what actually motivates them: the philosophical erotic hunger for knowledge, lust for forbidden knowledge, for frankly criminal considerations; but this doesn't make their exoteric stance any less real, let alone "metaphorical." It is a double teaching that recognizes that what is necessary in political life may be entirely different from what is necessary for the philosopher's function. Dealing with this difference with respect to the circumstances of one's own time is the purpose of the esoteric-exoteric distinction, and arguably the purpose of political philosophy in the first place.

But then in Nietzsche's work the political and moral philosophy carries the same import and is to be taken seriously. Nietzsche also is attempting to do what Plato did—that is, the esoteric aim, the preservation of philosophy, is the same—but the means are different because the time is different. Morality and politics is entirely instrumental. The concern is what is most salutary *in the given circumstances* to philosophy or high culture. In reply to his readers above, Nietzsche might say, "Yes

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[12] For example, as Bloom has argued in the previously mentioned interpretive essay on the *Republic*, the public and political program of the *Republic* depends on the "excision" of or abstraction away from *eros*, which is, however, shown to be the ground of philosophical activity in the *Symposium* (and possibly the *Phaedrus*.) But both programs or regimes are meant in earnest. The exoteric program is not merely for self-protection.

my statements have also a spiritual meaning besides the overt one, but this spiritual meaning will not carry any weight, and will be ineffective, until the reader is also able to take the overt meaning quite literally—until, indeed, the souls of modern men are reformed according to this overt and plain meaning." In line with what we have seen in the previous chapters, Nietzsche's attempt for the "rebarbarization" of the human spirit is to be taken in earnest and to be taken seriously: especially so when we see, as we will, that according to him the effect of the Platonic project has been an all-too-successful *taming* and denaturing of European man.

To say that in Nietzsche's exoteric moral and political program we find ultimately the defense of philosophy is then not to search for "irony" or "metaphors," but to understand the concept of *spiritual warfare:* precisely in achieving his political and moral aims in earnest, if he is able to do so, will philosophy find the ground, the spiritual and cultural preconditions from which it can once again flourish. Nietzsche breaks with the Platonic project and points back to the "dark roots" of philosophy because he shares Plato's ultimate aims. They disagree only as to tactics. It is the crisis of Nietzsche's time, a crisis in large part created by the failure of the Platonic project, that compels him to think it necessary to break entirely with the Platonic project of "political philosophy." The failure of political Platonism forces the thinker who cares about the preservation of philosophy to abandon the "politic mask" that was discussed in the previous chapter, the mask of the philosopher as good and pious citizen, and of philosophy as a support for moral life. It was time to bring "Callicles"—the original political voice of philosophy, or the political thought of preSocratic philosophy, unedited and

unvarnished—out in the open again. Indeed, it was maybe needful to intensify Callicles' rhetoric as a way to counter our too-tame age.

In this connection an analogy may be useful to understand the distinction between the esoteric and exoteric in a doctrine in general and in our case in particular. Certain religious teachings, for example Sufism, speak quite openly of this distinction, as do "heretical" sects of Islam in general.[13] Now, Sufism is often taken to be a "mystical" or spiritual interpretation of Islam. And in the West a certain claim has become popular in the press that, e.g., *jihad* means "spiritual struggle," is a metaphor for inner spiritual struggle, and that the outward meaning of war on unbelievers is merely metaphorical or should be interpreted "spiritually." That is, that *jihad* means primarily inner spiritual struggle. This reading has some superficial truth to it, but fails precisely in the same way the above-mentioned interpretations of Nietzsche fail. This reading—almost exclusively drawn from schools like Sufism and Ismailism, or from Islamic philosophers, all of whom avowedly speak of the distinction between an overt and a hidden teaching—fails to take into account what exotericism actually means. Exotericism doesn't mean "irony" or "metaphor," and it is *never just* mask or mere rhetoric. What could be the purpose of that? Accordingly we see that throughout its history Sufism has never in practice opposed *jihad* as physical war on unbelievers, but embraced it, even within

[13] See for the following discussion Michael J. Sweeney "Philosophy and "Jihād:" Al-Fārābī on Compulsion to Happiness" *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol. 60, No. 3 (Mar., 2007), pp. 543-72; the classic discussion of *ketman* in Czeslaw Milosz *The Captive Mind* 1953 chapter 3, itself adapted from Gobineau is also useful.

our own time.[14] This is because the image from Sufism as to how this distinction should be interpreted—especially important for our purposes here—is not of inner truth and outward "metaphor" or of inner truth and outward lies;[15] rather, the image invoked by the Sufi mystic is between the inner garden tended by the initiate on one hand, and the outer walls manned by the defenders of the faith on the other. These latter make the former safe and make the life of the mystic possible; the "spiritual struggle" is dependent on its being defended by the outward physical struggle, which is real and meant in earnest. The mystic, tending the inner spiritual garden and the ultimate truths, has a parallel task to encourage and support the defender of the faith, to make his faith strong and the outward walls powerful.

This is in simplified form the distinction between the esoteric and exoteric teaching of a doctrine. The exoteric has reality and has force even if, in some cases, it has only provisional or "political" truth. Political truth means that it must have truth for the layman or for "the many," or for the politically significant part of the regime. Politically effective truth is not the same as truth as such. Each has a sphere and dignity of its own. Thus a fruitful way to read Nietzsche is to be able to consider his most vehement or questionable statements, not as metaphors with a "spiritual" meaning, but as an exoteric, that is, public and political teaching, which, however, is

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[14] The conflict in Chechnya and in general in the Caucasus is run by Sufi networks; see, e.g., Michael Kemper, "Khālidiyya Networks in Daghestan and the Question of Jihād" *Die Welt des Islams* New Series, Vol. 42, Issue 1 (2002), pp. 41-71

[15] At least the latter distinction—between inner truth and an outward opportunistic lie, a mere lie—does exist to some extent both in some religions and philosophical schools (e.g., the well-known *taqqiya*) and does serve an immediate purpose, one of self-protection. But it is a mistake to believe that this type is the most significant kind of "esotericism"; in Platonism the outward truth, the exoteric part, is not just an opportunistic lie for self-protection, but a noble or salutary lie, one that carries content and that is meant to reform public morality in significant ways. By contrast, the distinction between inner truth and outward metaphor (or irony) has questionable value for a doctrine to begin with. It's not clear what Nietzsche, or any other writer, would be trying seriously to achieve by employing such a literary device.

but another instrument or weapon in the context of his overall strategy—this being indeed "spiritual" in the sense that philosophy and its preservation is his chief concern.

## *II. Nietzsche on Aristocracy and the Decay of Aristocratic Regime as Preconditions for High Culture, Philosophy, and Tyranny—*

### *a) Aristocratic physical culture as precondition of philosophical life*

It may be useful to recall at this point, however briefly, the definition of an aristocracy, and the fact that an aristocracy is distinct from other kinds of elites. It has already been remarked repeatedly in the previous chapters that an aristocracy is generally defined as a regime of virtue, and that the two chief virtues of primitive Homeric aristocracy were *andreia* and *phronesis,* standing originally for prowess in battle and ability to give good counsel in assembly. These two virtues, geared toward action and war-making, are valued also by other aristocracies throughout history and across the world—the example of the Tutsi has been given in the first chapter, who similarly understand themselves as brave in battle, politically sophisticated, refined, and cruel.

The discussion of virtues, however, must not only be abstract but should be made concrete in some images. This is especially so in the ancient Greek case because according to Nietzsche, and arguably according to ancient Greek aristocrats themselves, the virtues are much more matter of fact and *physical* than we like to think and than one gathers from the body of work left behind by the Socratic schools—which are a late phenomenon, which "spiritualized," intellectualized, or moralized the virtues, and, according to Nietzsche and others, which were in any case the minority position for most of antiquity.[16] To see aristocracy again for how it actually saw itself is a difficult task, which has been considered already from various points of view in this thesis. Let us then again, as a reminder, take one limited, but very physical, colorful and instructive example to draw out the difference between an aristocracy and other kinds of elites: the matter of *tanning.* It is taken for granted by many modern historical scholars and journalists that to be tan has historically been a mark of the lower classes who had to work outdoors all day, whereas the upper classes avoid tanning as a marker of status, i.e., supposedly to show off their freedom from having to do labor.[17] This is, however, not the ancient Greek view.

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[16] TWI "What I Owe to the Ancients" 2 in which Thucydides is mentioned as the flower of Sophist culture, over and against which the Socratic schools represent a late an unHellenic alternative.

[17] In fact this attitude is likely a middle class or lower middle class phenomenon, not an upper class one. It is unlikely that the upper classes felt such insecurity in their position or bearing that they thought they'd be confused for a day-laborer or serf because they were tan; indeed, as we have seen above, Homer seems to delight in depicting Odysseus as homeless and nude on the beach when he meets Nausicaa—the aristocratic or kingly man is able to establish his status by his bearing and his speech even when he's a homeless, naked shipwreck. The pattern of depicting high-status men as darker in skin tone than women has a long artistic tradition stretching back to ancient Egyptian art: the men are shown as tan presumably because they were expected to spend time outdoors in war, in preparation for war, in hunting, and in similar political, manly high-status activities [see Mary Ann Eaverly *Tan Men/Pale Women: Color and Gender in Archaic Greece and Egypt. A Comparative Approach* The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2013]. By contrast pale men were seen, much like in Greece, as effeminates who, rather than enjoying aristocratic activities such as hunting, military enterprise, and training in the gymnasium, spent their days indoors with women and

There are two striking passages, one from Plato, one from Xenophon, where this is made clear.

Plato in having Socrates discuss oligarchy and its deficits—as *distinct* from aristocracy—at *Republic* 556d says that "it is often the case that a lean, tanned, poor man is ranged in battle next to a rich man, *reared in the shade, surrounded by a great deal of alien flesh, and sees him panting and full of perplexity*... How can he avoid drawing the conclusion that men like him are only rich because no one has the courage to despoil them? And when they meet in private will not people be saying to one another 'Our warriors are not good for much?'" It is significant that Plato is discussing here the means by which an oligarchy is overthrown by the people. Then also, Socrates says that such a man, "makes war like an oligarch, with a few of his troops, is defeated most of the time, and stays rich." [*Rep.* 555a] Similarly, as a matter of distinguishing aristocracy from oligarchy, Xenophon has a parallel image in his *Agesilaus,* when he discusses a Spartan king leading his aristocratic contingent before a battle with the Persians:

> Thereupon it was a sight to see the gymnasiums thronged with warriors going through their exercises, the racecourses crowded with troopers on prancing steeds, the archers and the javelin men shooting at the butts. Nay, the whole city in which he lay was transformed into a spectacle itself, so filled to overflowing was the market-place with arms and armour of every sort, and horses, all for sale. Here were coppersmiths and carpenters, ironfounders and cobblers, painters and decorators—one and all busily engaged in fabricating the implements of war; so that an onlooker might have thought the city of Ephesus itself a gigantic arsenal. It would have kindled courage in the breast of a coward to see the long lines of soldiers, with Agesilaus at their head, all garlanded as they marched in proud

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children (hence the Greek observation, see below, that Persians were paler-skinned than Greeks), or as banausics who worked at mechanical jobs indoors, slaves who worked in the mines, and so forth. Such an attitude seems to be almost a constant throughout history, whether it was explicitly commented upon or not; Machiavelli mentions hunting and outdoors preparation for war as *the* most important activity for the energetic prince (*Prince* XIV). The belief of modern scholars and journalists that the upper classes avoided tanning because of status insecurity is therefore likely ahistorical, and quite bizarre, and depends on ignoring evidence from the example of ancient Greek and similar aristocracies; it requires a different explanation.

procession from the gymnasiums and dedicated their wreaths to our Lady Artemis. Since, where these three elements exist—reverence towards heaven, practice in military affairs, and obedience to command—all else must needs be full of happy promise.

*But seeing that contempt for the foe is calculated to infuse a certain strength in face of battle, he ordered his criers to strip naked the barbarians captured by his foraging parties, and so to sell them. The soldiers who saw the white skins of these folk, unused to strip for toil, soft and sleek and lazy-looking, as of people who could only stir abroad in carriages, concluded that a war with women would scarcely be more formidable.* Then he published a further order to the soldiers: "I shall lead you at once by the shortest route to the stronghold of the enemy's territory. Your general asks you to keep yourselves on the alert in mind and body, as men about to enter the lists of battle on the instant."[18]

In Xenophon's example the Persians are stand-ins for the oligarchic man, and the contrast between tan (Spartan-Greek) aristocracy and pale, untanned (Persian-Oriental) oligarchy is therefore made apparent in a very direct way. Aristocracy is not aristocracy without its members possessing and exhibiting virtue, of which, for example, a strong body and tan skin is a marker. And so let us emphasize again that virtue here is to be interpreted in a very concrete and "primitive" way: qualities, both physical and spiritual, necessary for or indicative of action, war, adventure, and nothing more. The inherent *physicality* of ancient Greek aristocracy, its orientation toward action and war, must be kept in mind if only to remind oneself, in the most concrete way, of the meaning of aristocratic *regime* as a severe program, strict and intolerant, over many generations; a program of breeding and training. The constitution of the Spartans, for example—which served as the model for the political thinking of so many ancient philosophers, Plato included[19]—unwritten, not enforced by judges, is therefore not well understood through comparisons to modern constitutions. It was not a purely legal document of rights and procedures,

[18] Xenophon *Agesilaus* 1.26-8

[19] See also Strauss at OT 207 explaining that Plato believed Sparta was superior to Athens.

and it was certainly not a declaration of moral sentiment or ideological doctrine. It is better compared to an athlete's physical, dietary, and spiritual training regimen.

It is facile but not entirely incorrect to connect the *physicality* of the ancient aristocratic program or regime to the birth and practice of philosophy—the contemplation of *phusis,* nature. Both Nietzsche and Plato himself might agree on this one point. And here already we see a way in which—apparently according to both Plato and Nietzsche—the aristocratic regime exists as a prerequisite of the philosophical life. In the dialogues of Plato we see infinite invocations of the art of the trainer of athletes (and horses), and of gymnastic exercise generally, as an analogy to or model of moral or political training, and even philosophical training. In the previous chapter we have seen Socrates in the *Gorgias* make repeated comparisons of the arts of gymnastics and medicine to the legitimate "arts of the soul," such as legislation.[20] There is strong indication that a similar comparison can be made, not only between athletic training and moral training, but between athletic enterprise and the philosophical life itself. The philosopher thus appears as an athlete of the intellect or the spirit—requiring similar generations of breeding and of the strictest personal regime and training if he is to achieve his aim. Plato's dialogue *Lovers* is maybe the most vehement attack on "mere learning" or on intellectuals in the tradition of political philosophy, perhaps even more vehement than what is to be found in Nietzsche's own work. In the depiction of an erotic contest in a gymnasium, Socrates goes so far as to side with a young athlete over a youth who is learned—a typical "intellectual." The argument is roughly that the

[20] Plato *Gorgias* 464b

athlete's method of training and lived practice is a lot more akin to the philosopher's way than the learning of the striving intellectual, which is superficial, incidental or arbitrary, accumulated for no clear reason except perhaps the pursuit of status or recognition, and serves to make its carrier weak and hobbled rather than strong. Although Nietzsche similarly mocks the middling intellectual and the purposeless accumulation of knowledge, I am aware of nowhere in his writings where he goes so far as to elevate simple physicality or athleticism over intellectual aspiration; even when he mocks the neurasthenic intellectual's inability to appeal to women, Nietzsche is arguably talking about a social or spiritual skill, the skill of seduction, and not mere physical ability and training, as Plato does in *Lovers.* This is not to say that Plato "secretly agrees" with Nietzsche on every point, but that on this problem of learning versus philosophy as a way of life, as an embodied principle, Plato seems rather more direct than even Nietzsche. Philosophy here, in a sexually charged erotic contest, sides with the physicality and training of the athlete over the erudition and way of life of the learned, of "those who have merely learned," to put it in Pindaric language. Aristocratic physical and athletic culture is, according to Plato, the closest model for philosophical training and culture.

Nietzsche agrees with this understanding of aristocratic athletic enterprise as a prerequisite for the philosophical life. In trying to explain how the "plebeian" Socrates was able to seduce the Athenian nobility to philosophy and *dialectics,* Nietzsche talks about athletic competition and the aristocratic desire for the *agon:*

> I have explained how it was that Socrates could repel: it is therefore all the more necessary to explain how he could fascinate. That he discovered a new kind of contest, that he became its first fencing master for the noble circles of Athens, is one point. He fascinated by appealing to the competitive

impulse of the Greeks — he introduced a variation into the wrestling match between young men and youths. Socrates was a great erotic.[21]

He goes on to claim that the Platonic philosophy itself was a spiritualization of Greek physical culture and of this same aristocratic competitive impulse:

Schopenhauer speaks of beauty with a melancholy fervor. Why? Because he sees in it a bridge on which one will go farther, or develop a thirst to go farther. Beauty is for him a momentary redemption from the "will" — a lure to eternal redemption. Particularly, he praises beauty as the redeemer from "the focal point of the will," from sexuality — in beauty he sees the negation of the drive toward procreation. Queer saint! Somebody seems to be contradicting you; I fear it is nature. To what end is there any such thing as beauty in tone, color, fragrance, or rhythmic movement in nature? What is it that beauty evokes? Fortunately, a philosopher contradicts him too. No lesser authority than that of the divine Plato (so Schopenhauer himself calls him) maintains a different proposition: that all beauty incites procreation, that just this is the proprium of its effect, from the most sensual up to the most spiritual. Plato goes further. He says with an innocence possible only for a Greek, not a "Christian," that there would be no Platonic philosophy at all if there were not such beautiful youths in Athens: it is only their sight that transposes the philosopher's soul into an erotic trance, leaving it no peace until it lowers the seed of all exalted things into such beautiful soil. Another queer saint! One does not trust one's ears, even if one should trust Plato. At least one guesses that they philosophized differently in Athens, especially in public. Nothing is less Greek than the conceptual web-spinning of a hermit — amor intellectualis dei [intellectual love of God] after the fashion of Spinoza. Philosophy after the fashion of Plato might rather be defined as an erotic contest, as a further development and turning inward of the ancient agonistic gymnastics and of its presuppositions. What ultimately grew out of this philosophic eroticism of Plato? A new art form of the Greek agon: dialectics...[22]

In this limited way then Nietzsche and Plato seem to "agree" on high culture and philosophy being rooted in aristocratic life. Socratic dialectics has its necessary prerequisite in one of the chief institutions of the aristocratic regime, in the competition of the *agon,* and very plainly in the physical *agon,* in wrestling and

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[21] TWI "The Problem of Socrates" 8

[22] TWI "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man 22-3. For the sake of completeness, note Nietzsche does go on to say that "Finally, I recall — against Schopenhauer and in honor of Plato — that the whole higher culture and literature of classical France too grew on the soil of sexual interest. Everywhere in it one may look for the amatory, the senses, the sexual contest, 'the woman' — one will never look in vain." This is, however, entirely in keeping with the general point made in this thesis, since the higher culture of modern France (and therefore of modern Europe), which grew out of the soil of sexual interest, was itself a noble or aristocratic culture according to Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 260: "art and enthusiasm in reverence and in devotion are the regular symptoms of an aristocratic way of thinking and valuing. From this we can without further ado understand why love as *passion* — which is our European specialty — must clearly have a noble origin: as is well known, its invention belongs to the Provencal knightly poets, those splendidly inventive men of the "*gay saber*" to whom Europe owes so much — almost its very self." This, however, is a later development that Nietzsche connects to the development of and reaction to Christianity, and therefore takes us somewhat outside the topic of this thesis.

athletic competition, which was a fixture of aristocratic life. Even more than this: Platonic philosophy requires that there be beautiful youths in Athens. It doesn't just require a specific institution or practice: it requires that there be beautiful physical specimens. Platonic philosophy has its chief prerequisite in the emergence of the "final result" or "end result" of the breeding and training program of the aristocratic regime—this being energetic physical beauty, which was only produced by a generations-long physical culture, itself ultimately geared to military training and war.[23]

Nietzsche elsewhere is quite direct about how the physical beauty of the Athenian youth, which inspired or impressed thinkers and philosophers from Plato to Cicero,[24] had to be the product of a careful, centuries-long, deliberate breeding project:

*Beauty no accident.* — The beauty of a race or a family, their grace and graciousness in all gestures, is won by work: like genius, it is the end result of the accumulated work of generations. One must have made great sacrifices to good taste, one must have done much and omitted much, for its sake — seventeenth-century France is admirable in both respects — and good taste must have furnished a principle for selecting company, place, dress, sexual satisfaction; one must have preferred beauty to advantage, habit, opinion, and inertia. Supreme rule of conduct: before oneself too, one must not "let oneself go." The good things are immeasurably costly; and the law always holds that those who have them are different from those who acquire them. All that is good is inherited: whatever is not inherited is imperfect, is a mere beginning.

In Athens, in the time of Cicero (who expresses his surprise about this), the men and youths were far superior in beauty to the women. But what work and exertion in the service of beauty had the male sex there imposed on itself for centuries! For one should make no mistake about the method in this case: a breeding of feelings and thoughts alone is almost nothing (this is the great misunderstanding underlying German education, which is wholly illusory), one must first persuade the body. Strict perseverance in significant and exquisite gestures together with

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[23] Camille Paglia makes a similar point when she talks about the origin of early Greek sculpture, and the first steps toward naturalism in Greek art. She speaks of the "discovery" of the iliac furrow, and the excitement over the new knowledge of such previously unknown muscle groups; such muscles would only appear with any regularity in a culture devoted to physical and athletic development. [See also discussion of *kouros* statuary and the *Kritios Boy* in 4th chapter of *Sexual Personae* Yale 2001, "Pagan Beauty"] Which once again underscores the connection earlier made, that knowledge of the body, of medicine, of livestock breeding techniques, of athletic regimen and training techniques, and so forth, developed over a long period, is likely the source of the idea of nature, very literally, as "physical" knowledge.

[24] "What Plato did [on behalf of philosophy] in the Greek city and for it, was done in and for Rome by Cicero..." Leo Strauss OT 206

the obligation to live only with people who do not "let themselves go" — that is quite enough for one to become significant and exquisite, and in two or three generations all this becomes inward. It is decisive for the lot of a people and of humanity that culture should begin in the right place — not in the "soul" (as was the fateful superstition of the priests and half-priests): the right place is the body, the gesture, the diet, physiology; the rest follows from that. Therefore the Greeks remain the first cultural event in history: they knew, they did, what was needed; and Christianity, which despised the body, has been the greatest misfortune of humanity so far.[25]

A problem, however, appears at this point: for it is not clear yet how and why an aristocracy as such should produce high culture, let alone philosophy. After all, Sparta is *the* aristocratic regime that fits the model discussed so far *par excellence* and yet it produced no high culture to speak of, and no philosophy; and, tellingly, managed to suppress its tyrannical or great men—among whom, Pausanias, Lysander, Brasidas, Clearchus.[26] Critias, Socrates' criminal, tyrannical, and mad student, is said to have written an abstraction or radicalization of the Spartan constitution, which he understood to have as its purpose the breeding of a "physically supreme specimen."[27] The Spartan regime is perhaps enough to produce this intended result, and maybe a magnificent—or terrible, according to one's

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[25] *Twilight of the Idols* "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man," 47. This matter of beauty as a precondition for philosophy can't be emphasized enough.

[26] An interesting future enterprise would be a study of these four and other minor similar figures in late Spartan history, how they were "cultivated" by the Spartan polity, and the means by which Sparta was ultimately able to neutralize them. Lysander was the first man to be worshiped as a god in the Greek cities, and was secretly aiming for a tyranny in Sparta. Clearchus' life, as we understand it from the accounts of both Diodorus Siculus (14.12) and Xenophon (who, tellingly, in a "noble" fashion, for "it is noble to remember only the good," leaves out much of the wild and atrocious behavior of his past, such as his attempts to set up a tyranny on the Hellespont and wholesale murder of the aristocracy in Byzantium), reads like a Conrad novel. Sparta *was* able to create what Nietzsche would call monstrous or amazing specimens as a result of its regime, but this never resulted in a flowering of high culture. This may have something to do with the fact that Spartan aristocracy never had a period of decay or decline in the sense of the Athenian aristocracy: the Spartan regime did not have a political collapse, it ended because it simply ran out of men; for example, after the second Battle of Mantinea, when it was only able to field a few hundred heavy infantry. The intense focus on citizen quality as opposed to quantity meant that many Greek cities periodically experienced the problem of *oligandria,* especially after heavy casualties were sustained. Aristotle explains in *Politics* book 2 the social and economic causes of Spartan decline in its marriage practices and the behavior of its women, who were not subject to the Spartan regime in the way the men were. This is, however, an entirely different form of "decline" than the one discussed in this thesis; the regime itself never wavered or relaxed its strictures; it just ran out of men.

[27] Clement *Miscellanies* VI 9, as appears in Sprague, *The Older Sophists* 1972

taste—political culture; but let us recall that Nietzsche's concern is not as such the production of a "physically supreme specimen" or of a strong polity, but of high culture and of philosophy. Which Athens had, but Sparta did not, though it too had a physical culture, and possibly an even more thoroughgoing aristocratic regime.

*b) Aristocratic regime and dissolution as precondition of philosophy; origin of the type of the philosopher and tyrant*

The process through which an aristocratic regime produces high culture, genius, the types of the philosopher and the tyrant, is complicated and likely to please neither the partisans of aristocracy nor the partisans of democracy. For on the one hand, as impressive as certain aristocratic states were, they never managed to produce great philosophers or artists, at least not in any number—Nietzsche has, as we are about to see, great respect for the polities of Rome and Venice, for example, but says of the former, in comparison to ancient Greece, that it was a case of the stalk growing overstrong at the expense of the flower.[28] He has tremendous respect, as we will see, for the maritime and commercial patriciate of Genoa, but nowhere speaks of the great cultural output of Genoa (though some of it was arguably considerable).

[28] From 1870-1 note, "A state that cannot attain its ultimate goal usually swells to an unnaturally large size. The world-wide empire of the Romans is nothing sublime when compared to Athens. The strength that really should go into the flower here remains in the leaves and stem, which flourish." As quoted in *The Portable Nietzsche* trans. Kaufmann Penguin 1977 p. 32

Thus one must make a distinction between Nietzsche's reflections on certain types of aristocracy as such, and, on the other hand, the kind of aristocracy that actually produces philosophy, which is our concern here. Not all aristocracy is the cause of philosophy. Conversely, however, aristocracy does seem to be a *necessary,* though not sufficient, prerequisite for at least the birth of philosophy and high culture. While it is true that Nietzsche associates the flowering of culture and of philosophy with *political weakness,* and, as we are about to see, with the ending or loosening of actual aristocratic regimes—and therefore with what might roughly be called liberalization or democratization—nevertheless the inner features of high culture, and in particular of the philosophical life, "carry over" aristocratic attitudes, institutions, presuppositions. These represent an abstraction or "radicalization" of aristocratic regime.

The mechanism in general follows the pattern just presented regarding physical culture, athletics, and beauty: in that case we have seen Nietzsche argue that, on the one hand, Socratic dialectics itself was a spiritualization or "abstraction" of the Greek *agon.* And, on the other, that the inspiration for the Platonic philosophy had as its prerequisite the actual existence of beautiful Athenian youth, which again in this case, even more strikingly, presupposes not just an aristocratic "idea" or institution, but one of the actual end-products of the aristocratic regime, which was so focused on physical breeding and training from its conception. Thus, although, as we are about to see, the flowering of high culture does require a "liberalization" of sorts, it is not the liberalization itself that is the cause of high culture either: this is valuable only insofar as it "frees up" aristocratic energies and redirects them toward

the life of the intellect. Let us consider in some further detail then how Nietzsche believes that aristocracy is a precondition for the production of high culture.

To understand Nietzsche on the meaning of "the noble" it is necessary to read him in an entirely unsentimental and un-rhetorical fashion, and to try to grasp the historical argument he is making—it is therefore necessary to understand "the noble" coldly, as he himself says it must be understood; that is, to abandon rhetorical or moralistic conceptions of nobility. The aristocratic regime is originally intended for one thing: self-defense, self-perpetuation in the face of danger. It is a community geared toward war and interested in perpetuating the qualities necessary for war. So far this thesis has repeatedly argued that the original and "universal" basic aristocratic virtues are *phronesis* and *andreia.* This is entirely in keeping with the observations just made regarding Greek physical culture and the breeding and training for *beauty.* For this physical culture itself, the culture of the gymnasium and so forth, originally had a military function, which indeed it kept right up to the end of Greek civilization proper. Nietzsche, however, tunnels somewhat more deeply than this: the aristocratic regime requires something more fundamental, certain orientations or attitudes that precede what we might consider to be the virtues. These are intolerance, cruelty, and what Nietzsche calls the *pathos of distance.* Intolerance is absolutely necessary: it is a certain severity against others and against oneself; indeed Nietzsche goes so far as to point out that intolerance itself is considered a virtue by many historical aristocracies. In what could be

considered a perverse joke, cruelty and *pathos of distance* replace the two "social" virtues from Plato—temperance and justice—

> Every enhancement in the type "man" up to this point has been the work of an aristocratic society — and that's how it will always be, over and over again: a society which believes in a long scale of rank ordering and differences in worth between man and man and which, in some sense or other, requires slavery. Without the *pathos of distance*, the sort which grows out of the deeply rooted difference between the social classes, out of the constant gazing outward and downward of the ruling caste on the subjects and work implements, and out of their equally sustained practice of obedience and command, holding down and holding at a distance, that other more mysterious pathos would have no chance of growing at all, that longing for an ever new widening of distances inside the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more distant, more expansive, more comprehensive states, in short, simply the enhancement in the type "man," the constant "self-conquest of man," to cite a moral formula in a supra-moral sense. Of course, where the history of the origins of aristocratic society is concerned (and thus the precondition for that raising of the type "man"—), we should not surrender to humanitarian illusions: truth is hard. So without further consideration, let's admit to ourselves how up to this point every higher culture on earth has *started*! People with a still natural nature, barbarians in every dreadful sense of the word, predatory men still in possession of an unbroken power of the will and a desire for power, threw themselves on weaker, more civilized, more peaceful, perhaps trading or cattle-raising races, or on old, worn cultures, in which at that very moment the final forces of life were flaring up in a dazzling fireworks display of spirit and corruption. At the start the noble caste has always been the barbarian caste: its superiority has lain not primarily in physical might but in spiritual power — it has been a matter of *more complete* human beings (which at every level also means "more complete beasts").[29]

The connection that Nietzsche attempts to establish between higher culture and cruelty appears in many places in his writing, is well-known, and almost a commonplace. In the following passage he exposes cruelty—not even especially towards others, but *cruelty toward oneself*—as the foundation not just of high culture but of intellectual rigor, of philosophy:

> Almost everything we call "higher culture" is based on the spiritualization and intensification of *cruelty*—this is my proposition; the "wild beast" has not been laid to rest at all, it lives, it flourishes, it has merely become—deified. That which constitutes the painful voluptuousness of tragedy is cruelty; that which produces a pleasing effect in so-called tragic pity, indeed fundamentally in everything sublime up to the highest and most refined thrills of metaphysics, derives its sweetness solely from the ingredient of cruelty mixed in with it....Consider, finally, how even the man of knowledge, when he compels his spirit to knowledge which is *counter* to the inclination of his spirit and frequently also to the desires of his heart—by saying No, that is, when he would like to affirm, love, worship—disposes as an artist in and transfigurer of cruelty; in all taking things seriously and thoroughly, indeed, there is already a violation, a desire to hurt the fundamental will of the spirit, which ceaselessly strives for appearance and the superficial—in all desire to know there is already a drop of cruelty.[30]

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[29] BGE 257
[30] BGE 229

Aristocratic *cruelty* and the *pathos of distance*—cruelty against slaves, and, internalized, against the lower orders of one's own soul—is argued to be the foundation of higher cultural and intellectual life.

Nietzsche's words on cruelty and *pathos of distance* have a directly political and historical interpretation that is most relevant for the argument presented here. Historically cruelty and force is the indispensible ingredient for the foundation of the *polis,* the Greek city, the aristocratic polity that is the main object of study of classical political philosophy. One of the sources of Nietzsche's historical understanding of ancient Greece was almost surely the work of Jacob Burckhardt.[31] Burckhardt, himself a 19th century liberal, nevertheless emphasized the tremendous *suffering* and *cruelty* that was necessary for the creation of the *polis* as an entity. Namely, the ruthless extirpation and subsuming of all pre-*polis,* literally subpolitical life: the extirpation and eradication of village life, the reorganization, by force, of tribal, ethnic life into the city, into the aristocratic commonwealth we know as the *polis.* This wholesale and painful change in the life of the Greeks is somewhat lost to us today when we speak of the *polis* in the abstract. Burckhardt emphasizes the *cruelty* and intolerance inherent especially in the *polis'* orientation toward citizen *quality* and opposed to *quantity:* which necessarily entailed the severest requirements for participation in citizen life, and the severest sanctions against those who weren't able to maintain their position.[32] When Leo Strauss speaks of

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[31] The following discussion is based on Burckhardt *The Greeks and Greek Civilization* 1999 chapter 2 pp. 13-63, and p. 36, etc. regarding the suffering and violence upon which the *polis* must be based.
[32] It was notoriously easy to fall off the citizen rolls in Sparta for example. Burckhardt mentions p. 162 the passage in the Homeric hymn to Apollo where the Ionians, arriving in their ships at the festival at Delos, descend in procession looking magnificent, ageless and godlike; he hints at how

political life being superior to all subpolitical life, of having a precedence over these, of the classical conception of the city as natural to man, of man conceived of in classical political philosophy as a *political* animal—and when he furthermore adds that according to classical political philosophy, in distinction to modern, *force* is not unnatural—it is possible, even likely, that he has in mind not only abstract, ahistorical reflections on human nature, but this basic historical development to which Nietzsche, through Burckhardt, is alluding. It appears once again that without the aristocratic commonwealth of the *polis* and the cruelty and *"pathos of distance"* at its foundation, nature, and finally philosophy, have no opportunity to exhibit themselves. Neither philosophy nor nature are known in Socrates' tribal, subpolitical Rousseauean "city of pigs" in the *Republic.* The aristocratic severity Nietzsche is describing is necessary for the foundation of the *polis* on top of and at the expense of, subpolitical life.

The cruelty and pathos of distance—the feeling of rank between man and man—that are the physical and spiritual preconditions for the aristocratic commonwealth of the *polis* constitute also the inner features of the aristocratic regime or way of life: the severity and strictness *against oneself* to which Nietzsche so often alludes. This regime consists in the pruning, difficult and painful, over many generations, of traits, characteristics, "virtues" that are useful for the continued political existence of the aristocratic class in question. It is danger, political *pressure,* that is responsible for the continued existence of aristocratic morality, which, as morality, must serve to bind the members of the community together and to

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much *suffering* and cruelty was necessary for the creation of such a caste, and how modern historians really forget what the focus on citizen quality in ancient Greece really entailed.

homogenize them. Thus aristocracy and by extension the *polis* in general can only exist under the pressure of great danger:

> A *species* arises, a type becomes established and strong, under the long struggle with essentially unchanging, *unfavourable* conditions. By contrast, we know from the experience of breeders that species which receive an ultra-abundant nourishment and, in general, an increase in protection and care immediately tend towards variety in the type in the strongest manner and are rich in wonders and monstrosities (as well as monstrous vices). Now, let's look for a moment at an aristocratic commonwealth, for example, an ancient Greek *polis* or Venice, as an organization, whether voluntary or involuntary, for the purpose of *breeding*. There are men there living together who rely upon themselves and who want their species to succeed mainly because it *has to* succeed or run the fearful risk of being annihilated. Here there is a lack of that advantage, that abundance, that protection under which variations are encouraged. The species senses the need for itself as a species, as something which, particularly thanks to its hardness, uniformity, simplicity of form, can generally succeed and enable itself to keep going in the constant struggles with neighbours or with the rebellious oppressed people or with those who threaten rebellion. The most varied experience teaches them which characteristics they have to thank, above all, for the fact that they are still there, in spite of all the gods and men, that they have always been victorious. These characteristics they call virtues, and they cultivate only these virtues to any great extent. They do that with force — in fact, they desire force. Every aristocratic morality is intolerant in its education of the young, its provisions for women, its marriage customs, its relationships between young and old, its penal laws (which fix their eyes only on those who are deviants)— it reckons intolerance itself among the virtues, under the name "justice." A type with few but very strong characteristics, a species of strict, war-like, shrewdly laconic people, united and reserved (and, as such, having the most sophisticated feelings for the magic and *nuances* of society) will in this way establish itself over the succession of generations. The constant struggle with unvarying, *unfavourable* conditions is, as mentioned, the factor that makes a type fixed and hard.[33]

The danger can come from outside, from below, but finally also from within, from one of the members of the aristocracy itself. This political morality is therefore finally characterized by an inner tension wherein it must simultaneously breed and train warlike, wily, independent, supremely egotistical instincts and at the same time restrain these and subsume them to the benefit of the aristocratic community. The problem the *polis* faces is how to simultaneously spur on and also at the same time restrain such citizens. This restraint or this binding is what characterizes aristocratic morality *in tandem* with the sharpening of virtues and ambitions that are, by necessity, politically dangerous. This balance—maintained by severity,

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[33] BGE 262

cruelty, intolerance—is only maintained so long as there is great danger. Nietzsche repeats and enlivens this idea with reference to Venice and Rome, which lived

> five steps from tyranny, close to the threshold of the danger of servitude. This is true psychologically if by "tyrants" are meant inexorable and fearful instincts that provoke the maximum of authority and discipline against themselves; most beautiful type: Julius Caesar. This is true politically too; one need only go through history. The peoples who had some value, attained some value, never attained it under liberal institutions: it was great danger that made something of them that merits respect. Danger alone acquaints us with our own resources, our virtues, our armor and weapons, our spirit, and forces us to be strong. First principle: one must need to be strong — otherwise one will never become strong. Those large hothouses for the strong — for the strongest kind of human being that has so far been known — the aristocratic commonwealths of the type of Rome or Venice, understood freedom exactly in the sense in which I understand it: as something one has or does not have, something one wants, something one conquers.[34]

External as well as internal danger is the source of both the origin and the maintenance of the severe aristocratic ethos: internal because, on account of the particular types of military and political virtues that are cultivated, an aristocracy always faces danger, as Nietzsche emphasized, from one of its own. Aristocracy and aristocratic freedom is thus always coexistent with the danger of tyranny, which such a regime must take every precaution to prevent, yet always must keep as a *necessary* risk. The drive or desire to tyranny is a necessary consequence of aristocratic education, on account of its cultivation of politically dangerous abilities and ambitions. The dream of every Greek, as Plato knew, was to become tyrant.[35] This atmosphere of the "political hothouse" is what accounts for the aristocratic regime—for its strictness or severity extended in two directions. On one hand, in the direction of cultivating bodily and spiritual (or political) abilities under the strictest discipline for centuries; on the other hand, in the direction of restraining such men to a common goal and common type.

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[34] TWI, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man," 38

[35] Plato *Theages* 126a—famously even more so, that the dream was to become a god. The Spartan general Lysander was the first Greek to achieve this. Plutarch *Life of Lysander* 18.3

It is the moment when this political and spiritual tension, pent up over centuries, is finally released, that is most salutary for the production of high culture. I repeat once more that Venice and Rome, as high a praise as Nietzsche seems to have for them, are not especially distinguished in terms of the production of high culture, or at least of philosophy. There is then an extra step, not yet discussed, that is necessary before a flowering of high culture is possible. This step is "liberalization," a loosening of the aristocratic regime—even if Nietzsche should call it political weakening, degeneration, or decadence. Political weakening is good for culture. The political good is not the same as the highest good. High culture flourishes at the moment of liberalization or, from the aristocratic point of view, of decadence. The "immense power" built up over generations by the aristocratic regime for the benefit of political life alone is now, at the moment of political decline, free to flow into different directions and toward different ends. He calls this a "fortunate time":

> Finally, however, at some point a fortunate time arises, which lets the immense tension ease. Perhaps there are no more enemies among the neighbours, and the means for living, even for enjoying life, are there in abundance...Variation, whether as something abnormal (something higher, finer, rarer) or as degeneration and monstrosity, suddenly bursts onto the scene in the greatest abundance and splendour; the individual dares to be individual and stand out. At these historical turning points there appear alongside each other and often involved and mixed up together marvellous, multifaceted, jungle-like growths, an upward soaring, a kind of tropical tempo in competitiveness for growing and an immense annihilation and self-destruction, thanks to the wild egoisms turned against each other and, as it were, exploding, which wrestle with one another "for sun and light" and no longer know how to derive any limit, any restraint, or any consideration from the morality they have had up to that point. **This very morality was the one which built up such immense power, which bent the bow in such a threatening manner — now, at this moment, it has become "outdated."** The dangerous and disturbing point is reached where the greater, more multifaceted, and more comprehensive life lives over and above the old morality...the genius of the race brimming over from all the horns of plenty with good and bad, a catastrophic simultaneous presence of spring and autumn, full of new charms and veils, characteristic of young, still unexhausted, still unwearied depravity. Once again there's danger there, the mother of morality, great danger, this time

transferred into the individual, into one's neighbour and friend, into the alleyways, into one's own child, into one's own heart, into all the most personal and most secret wishes and desires.[36]

And so we see what Nietzsche means when he says that "all great ages of culture are ages of political decline: what is great culturally has always been unpolitical, even anti-political."[37] As long as the *political work* of the regime has already been carried out for generations, if not centuries, and as long as the regime has managed to cultivate "immense power," "virtues"—in particular the political "virtues" consequent on the *pathos of distance*—a time of sudden decline, a loosening of political pressures, dangers, and an unbinding of the strict morality developed to deal with these dangers, such a time of *political weakness* may indeed be salutary for high culture. But in order to take advantage of such an event, there need be present those wild egoisms that aristocracy has bred and nurtured along with wild abilities and political sophistication. It is thanks to the presence of such natures that, now in a time of freedom, there is a hankering after the new, strange, and exotic in the first place. Nietzsche explicitly connects the Italian Renaissance, with its desire for the new and strange, its belief in progress and science, its exploratory spirit, to the selfish egoisms of the urban patriciate, in particular to the aristocratic *mores* of, for example, the rulers of Genoa, who were now free and had grown tired and bored of all old authority.

I have looked upon this city, its villas and pleasure grounds, and the wide circuit of its inhabited heights and slopes for a considerable time. In the end I must say that I see countenances out of past generations - this district is strewn with the images of bold and autocratic men. They have lived and have wanted to live on - they say so with their houses, built and decorated for centuries, and not for the passing hour: they were well disposed to life, however ill disposed they may often have been towards themselves. I always see the builder, how he casts his eye on all that is built around him far and near, and likewise on the city, the sea, and the chain of mountains; how he expresses power and

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[36] BGE 262 and compare with the similar idea expressed at *Human All too Human* 224 "Ennoblement Through Degeneration"

[37] TWI "What the Germans Lack" 4

conquest with his gaze: all this he wishes to fit into his plan, and in the end make it his property, by its becoming a portion of the same. The whole district is overgrown with this superb, insatiable egoism of the desire to possess and exploit; **and as these men when abroad recognised no frontiers, and in their thirst for the new placed a new world beside the old, so also at home everyone rose up against everyone else, and devised some mode of expressing his superiority, and of placing between himself and his neighbour his personal infinity.** [38] Each one established a home for himself by overpowering it with his architectural ideas and refashioning it into a house that was a feast for the eyes. When we consider the north, one is impressed by the law, and the general delight in lawfulness and obedience that is apparent as one contemplates the way the cities are built. One is led to guess at the ways in which people fundamentally regarded themselves as equal and subordinated themselves; that must have been what was dominant in the souls of the builders. But what you find here upon turning any corner is a human being who knows the sea, adventure and the Orient; **a human being who abhors the law and the neighbour as a kind of boredom and who measures everything old and established with envious eyes. With the marvelous cunning of his imagination he would like to establish all of this anew** – at least in thought – and put his hand and meaning to it – if only for the moments on a sunny afternoon when his insatiable and melancholy soul does for once feel satiated and only what is his and nothing alien appears to his eyes.[39]

At the point of the most acute decline of the aristocratic project, when the danger of the greatest "exhaustion" appears: Nietzsche claims in a remarkable passage that precisely at this moment is when the most amazing specimens can emerge. Nietzsche finally explicitly connects what the reader by now may have suspected: the ages he speaks of, the ages of the birth of high culture and of philosophy are necessarily also those ages when the *tyrannical type* can ascend. This is so for two reasons. First of all because the aristocratic morality that is now declining, the political power that is now lessened, had as one of its principal objects

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[38] Here is then another way in which the aristocratic *pathos of distance* is said to be a prerequisite for science and philosophy; it is apparently also the root ultimately of the hankering after the new. Nietzsche's reference to the new world, to Columbus and the spirit of exploration, should be compared to Strauss' reference to Machiavelli as a "greater Columbus" at NRH 177

[39] *Gay Science* 291 compare to what Nietzsche says regarding the Renaissance as a whole at *Human All Too Human* 237; where he again contrasts the Italian love of the new and desire for the "complete fusion of the ancient and modern spirit" to the German "backwardness" of the Reformation that stopped this salutary process; also see *Twilight of the Idols* "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man," 37 and 44, where the Renaissance is called a "squandering" and a "finale": "The danger that lies in great men and ages is extraordinary; exhaustion of every kind, sterility, follow in their wake. The great human being is a finale; the great age — the Renaissance, for example — is a finale. The genius, in work and deed, is necessarily a squanderer: that he squanders himself, that is his greatness! The instinct of self-preservation is suspended, as it were: the overpowering pressure of outflowing forces forbids him any such care or caution."

the restraint of potential tyrants. One of the great "dangers" urban aristocracies face is the prospect of one of their own reaching for tyranny; such an event is therefore far more likely in an age of political and moral weakening or "liberalization." But there is a second and more profound reason Nietzsche gives for the relationship between high culture and tyranny. The same spiritual confusion, and even confusion of the blood, that comes with political weakening and that, in the general case, results in moral and spiritual exhaustion, this same "anarchy" of the instincts, or danger of being internally tyrannized by wild impulses, results, in the case of rarer and fortuitous natures, in an enhancement or strengthening. There is then an inner kinship or likeness between the tyrannical type that appears in late aristocracy and the artist or thinker that appears at this same time. Both are related to each other in that they are able, by similar inherited and acquired internal defenses, to overcome the decadence and general weakness of the time—

> The man from an age of dissolution, which mixes the races all together, such a man has an inheritance of a multiple ancestry in his body, that is, conflicting and frequently not merely conflicting drives and standards of value which war among themselves and rarely give each other rest — such a man of late culture and disturbed lights will typically be a weaker man. His most basic demand is that the war which *constitutes* him should finally end. Happiness seems to him, in accordance with a calming medicine and way of thinking (for example, Epicurean or Christian), principally as the happiness of resting, of having no interruptions, of surfeit, of the final unity, as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths," to use the words of the saintly rhetorician Augustine, who was himself such a man. But if the opposition and war in such a nature work like one *more* charm or thrill in life — and bring along, in addition to this nature's powerful and irreconcilable drives, also the real mastery and refinement in waging war with itself, and thus transmit and cultivate self-ruling and outwitting of the self, then arise those delightfully amazing and unimaginable people, those enigmatic men predestined for victory and temptation, whose most beautiful expressions are Alcibiades and Caesar (— in their company I'd like to place the *first* European, according to my taste, the Hohenstaufen Frederick II), and, among artists, perhaps Leonardo da Vinci. They appear precisely in the same ages when that weaker type, with its demands for quiet, steps into the foreground: both types belong with one another and arise from the same causes.[40]

Herein appears the same pattern discussed above regarding the way in which aristocratic regime functions as a precondition for the emergence of "high

[40] BGE 200

culture"—in this case, unlike in the discussion on Genoa and on the Italian Renaissance, the concern is not just with the emergence of high intellectual and artistic culture or the intellectual desire for the new, but with the emergence of new, frankly tyrannical, if brilliant, types of men. The mention of Alcibiades is particularly interesting for our argument,[41] given his connection both to Socratic philosophy and to the association made in antiquity between Socrates and tyranny. But we don't need to *speculate* very much further on this point, for Nietzsche himself explains explicitly and in some detail the connection between the emergence of the *tyrannical* type just mentioned—the type of Alcibiades—and of philosophy. He goes so far as to call philosophers, the earliest philosophers, "tyrants of the spirit":

*Tyrants of the spirit*....These philosophers had a firm belief in themselves and in their "truth," and with it they overcame all their neighbors and predecessors; each of them was a combative and violent tyrant. Perhaps the happiness of believing oneself in possession of the truth was never greater in the world, but neither was the severity, arrogance, tyranny, and evil of such a belief. They were tyrants, which is what every Greek wanted to be, and which each one was, if he was able. Perhaps only Solon is an exception: in, his poetry he tells how he despised personal tyranny. But he did it out of love for his work, for his lawgiving; and to be a lawgiver is a sublimated form of tyranny. Parmenides, too, gave laws, probably Pythagoras and Empedocles as well; Anaximander founded a city. Plato was the incarnate wish to become the greatest philosophical lawgiver and founding father of a state; he seems to have suffered terribly that his nature was not fulfilled, and towards the end, his soul became full of the blackest bile. The more Greek philosophy lost power, the more it suffered inwardly because of this bile and need to slander. When various sects finally fought for their truths in the streets, the souls of all these suitors of truth were completely clogged with jealousy and venom; the tyrannic element raged like a poison in their bodies. These many petty tyrants would have liked to devour one another raw; there was not a spark of love left in them, and all too little joy in their own knowledge. The tenet that tyrants are usually murdered and that their descendants live briefly

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[41] Leo Strauss discusses Alcibiades and this striking aphorism at *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* pg. 184 but, strangely enough, what he has to say seems at least at surface level to be entirely matter-of-fact, and somewhat off-point. He brings up the example of Caesar and Alcibiades from this aphorism only to point out how Nietzsche is obviously free from "herd morality," and to show how these two figures, especially Alcibiades, exemplify a different type of morality. This may be so, but it seems a strange point, as it is not the main contrast Nietzsche makes here—Nietzsche doesn't even mention herd morality. The same "freedom" from herd morality is better illustrated elsewhere in Nietzsche's writing. The matter becomes even more mysterious when one notes that Strauss seems entirely to miss the point of Nietzsche's reflections on the relationship between breeding, blood, the *dissolution* of aristocratic morality or political institutions, and the emergence of types like Alcibiades. Why would Strauss ignore Nietzsche's main claim in this aphorism? Given Strauss' deep knowledge of Nietzsche one should err here on the side of believing that he knew exactly what Nietzsche was talking about but chose to somewhat distort or tone down Nietzsche's argument. See below, appendix.

is also generally true of the tyrants of the spirit. Their history is short, violent; their influence breaks off suddenly. One can say of almost all great Hellenes that they seem to have come too late, thus Aeschylus, Pindar, Demosthenes, Thucydides; one generation follows them-and then it is always over forever. That is the turbulent and uncanny thing about Greek history...With the Greeks, things go forward swiftly, but also as swiftly downwards...What took place with the Greeks (that each great thinker, believing he possessed absolute truth, became a tyrant, so that Greek intellectual history has had the violent, rash, and dangerous character evident in its political history) was not exhausted with them...[42]

Thus Greek political history is said directly to parallel Greek philosophical history, not in its substance, but at the very least in its inner character—the way of life of the philosopher, the tensions and egoisms of his soul, requires the exact same preparatory work as the life of the tyrant, and though directed to very different ends, the two share an inner kinship. The same complex of contradictory drives and instincts that Nietzsche described in Alcibiades, the same inner conflict of the late-stage aristocratic "monster": this inner tension is "spiritualized," that is, intellectualized and transposed into the desire for truth in the case of the philosopher. The highest creation of Greek culture—what Nietzsche elsewhere calls "the crown of culture"—the philosophical way of life, or the variety in types of the philosopher, is, as we can see from the words used, itself an internalization of the same severity, *pathos of distance,* cruelty towards others and oneself that was essential to the aristocratic regime. In these two passages, from different books at different times in Nietzsche's life,[43] we see precisely the same idea: the philosopher and the tyrant are the same, at least in their beginnings. Philosophy and tyranny, the

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[42] *Human All Too Human* 261. At least regarding the ancient tendency to describe the founders of philosophical sects in explicitly political terms note that "founder of the constitution" is the word used by Diogenes Laertius; e.g., the passage VI.15, where Antisthenes is described very explicitly as *autos hupothemenos tei politeiai ta themelia* of the Cynic and Stoic schools

[43] ...and supposedly different "periods" in his work—for *Human, All Too Human* is said to belong to his "middle" stage.

types of Plato and Alcibiades, are characteristic late outgrowths of aristocratic regimes on the point of collapse—they are "radicalizations" of this regime.

Let us in the conclusion of this section summarize Nietzsche's argument. An aristocratic regime has its origins in necessity, in particular in the danger of annihilation. Barbarians, feral men, impose themselves on top of a sedentary or possibly more civilized population and have to maintain their position under the threat of constant danger, first of all from below and from abroad. Faced with relentless pressure they are forced to sharpen and intensify those qualities, and only those qualities, that are favorable to their continued survival and the maintenance of their position: these qualities they call virtues. Such virtues can in general be summarized as martial ability and political ability: the Homeric *andreia* and *phronesis,* or roughly, courage and practical wisdom. Together with these is intensified a closely related but separate set of "virtues" that may with some humor be called the "social" virtues, for they replace the Platonic *justice* and *temperance;* but instead Nietzsche emphasizes *intolerance,* and the associated qualities of *cruelty* and of *pathos of distance.* It is only through the latter that the former "substantial" qualities can be inculcated over many generations, in what Nietzsche calls a program of breeding and training—indeed he calls the aristocratic polity as such a program of breeding. Such a regime tends to a homogeneity of type, again under the pressure of necessity: deviations are not tolerated because there is no luxury and *no time* for them under conditions of permanent pressure.

The aristocratic regime furnishes the "raw material" for the further development of high culture, and in particular of philosophy, in two closely related ways. First of all in the institutions, practices, strictures, and pre-rational sentiments inculcated by its education or training. For example, the sentiment Nietzsche calls *pathos of distance*—the feeling or instinct for variations in *rank,* for the chasm that exists between slave and free man, for the talent in obedience and command—is a prerequisite for "longing for an ever new widening of distances inside the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more distant, more expansive, more comprehensive states," that is, for the enhancement of humanity or development of higher aspirations and high culture. Or, to take another example, the *agon,* an aristocratic institution of competition, especially athletic competition—but which Nietzsche elsewhere also calls the inner engine of the Greek political life—is refined by Platonic philosophy into dialectics.

Second—and this is the more radical point that is harder to accept—the "raw material" for philosophy is furnished by the aristocratic regime in a much more direct and literal way, in that only the impressive specimens bred over generations by such a regime can become philosophers in the beginnings of philosophy, or receive philosophy at its beginnings. This point is made in a somewhat limited way, but for our purposes, most *clearly,* when Nietzsche discusses the incredible work that had to go into cultivating physical beauty in Athens—itself originally just the consequence of a physical culture geared toward athletics and thus at bottom toward warfare. The physical beauty that impressed thinkers and philosophers, and

that in particular was the fertile ground and inspiration for Platonic philosophy, was one of the end-products of the breeding program inherent in the aristocratic regime.

The same reasoning applies more generally for other qualities that result in "high culture," and in particular the same reasoning or pattern applies to explain the origin of philosophy. As these virtues are cultivated and sharpened, the aristocratic regime faces very soon an internal danger, the danger of tyranny. Much of aristocratic "social" virtue, the homogeneity of which Nietzsche speaks, is then directed toward self-defense against such an event: against one of their own "beautiful monsters"—Nietzsche mentions Caesar—or deviants taking over from the inside. One is reminded of the old guard gentlemen in Athens outraged at Alcibiades' antics, in particular his using an emblem of Eros with a thunderbolt on his shield—the aristocratic taste fears and abhors such extravagant displays among its members, and for good reason. And yet an aristocracy can't do without its own at least being tempted in such a direction: it was the secret dream of every Greek to be a tyrant, and this desire is likely a natural consequence of training men, to paraphrase Machiavelli, to be very strong in mind and body, of teaching them dangerous political skills, and of encouraging the "wild egoisms" and ambition that goes along with such skills.

When, finally, the "fortunate moment" of political weakness comes, the previously-enforced homogeneity breaks down and the long-pent-up tension in the regime bursts free. The homogeneity is replaced by a "tropical" proliferation of "monstrous" types, most of them weakened or deficient, but a few luckily enhanced. The qualities or virtues, the inner states, that are the result of aristocratic breeding

and education are now "liberated" to take their paths in new and unexpected directions, in directions no longer constrained by the necessity for political survival. There is indeed a taste for the new as such, and a taste for transgression, a boredom with the law and with equality: much like, for example, in imperial Roman times, there seemed to be a constant *joy* in the mockery and transgression of the old aristocratic republican personae and mores. Among these new specimens may be "amazing" enigmatic types like Alcibiades or Caesar—tyrannical men—or otherwise artists like da Vinci. Or, more specifically and most relevant for the argument here, the early Greek philosophers, who Nietzsche also describes as tyrannical types and who, like the characters just mentioned, embody simultaneously a freedom from the strictures of aristocratic morality and an intensification of the virtues, sentiments, and abilities that the aristocratic project cultivated—again whether by training or actually by breeding. Nietzsche emphasizes this last point by explicitly saying that mixture of classes, and therefore of races, during times of political dissolution, may give an extra impetus to men like Alcibiades, in the form of yet another inner conflict to overcome.

Thus the age of the dissolution of aristocratic republics is the age most amenable to high culture generally and to philosophy in particular. A claim that seems to be echoed, surprisingly maybe, in Machiavelli. He says that it was during Roman imperial times, during the reign of the five good Emperors, that the world was in all its glory, that the greatest thinkers had finally the freedom to think and to write what they pleased. Of course we tend to think of the Empire as authoritarian and "imperial," but it was in fact a time of liberalization and democratization

compared to republican Rome—of general weakness, dissolution, decadence, to use Nietzsche's language. This double historical detritus of the aristocratic republic or the Greek *polis*—on one hand the production of genius and of philosophy, on the other hand, the decay of political and social life—is the background and the circumstance of the Platonic project, to which we now again briefly turn.

*III. Nietzsche on Platonic Political Philosophy*

The Platonic project can be understood as an "emergency medical measure" against the decay of the Greek world—the perceived decline and dissolution of aristocratic political and social institutions, in particular the decline of the *polis* itself. It was also simultaneously an attempt to save or preserve philosophy. The outer or exoteric meaning of Platonic political and moral philosophy was an attempt to "cure" Greek decadence, just as its inner or esoteric meaning was to make philosophy safe and even powerful in the cities—a comprehensive moral and political program, a work of "legislation" in the highest sense. In the long run this project was both a great success and a great failure. Nietzsche finds himself in the wake of the failure of a millennia-long moral, philosophical, political project—the failure of the Platonic project to preserve the possibility of philosophy. The Platonic project, originally conceived to preserve or perpetuate the philosophical life regardless of regime, ends up, through a significant modification, destroying the possibility of philosophy itself by destroying or corrupting nature. Nietzsche's exposure of the dark or primitive roots of philosophy, its original or primeval identity with deviant and criminal tyranny, is an attempt to recover nature.

An age of decadence or dissolution is, despite the occasional and colorful brilliance, nevertheless still decay and degeneration—words that Nietzsche attempts to use in an extra-moral sense.[44] This is an age of breakdown in political institutions and social relations characterized by war, chaos, anarchy, and the spiritual exhaustion, or desire for peace, that inevitably sets in during such times. Nietzsche typically, and, one might add, in typical Platonic fashion, has a discussion of the inner states of the soul or spirit that parallel this external political condition. An Alcibiades or Plato is a rare "monster" of such an age; the rule, the general case, the *interesting* case, is different and opposite: weakness, exhaustion, desire for rest and peace, and ultimately, mediocrity. Recall that in the same passage where Nietzsche discusses Alcibiades, Caesar, da Vinci, he mentions that these are exceptions, while the rule is

> The man from an age of dissolution, which mixes the races all together, such a man has an inheritance of a multiple ancestry in his body, that is, conflicting and frequently not merely conflicting drives and standards of value, which war among themselves and rarely give each other rest—such a man of late culture and broken lights will typically be a weaker man. His most basic demand is that the war which constitutes him should finally end. Happiness seems to him, in accordance with a calming medicine and way of thinking (for example, Epicurean or Christian), principally as the happiness of resting, of having no interruptions, of surfeit, of the final unity, as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths," to use the words of the saintly rhetorician Augustine, who was himself such a man.[45]

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[44] He was certainly not a typical "reactionary," let alone a social conservative. If that should not be clear already from material already quoted, consider the passage, well known from Straussian commentary, "Whispered to the conservatives. — What was not known formerly, what is known, or might be known, today: a reversion, a return in any sense or degree is simply not possible. We physiologists know that. Yet all priests and moralists have believed the opposite — they wanted to take mankind back, to screw it back, to a former measure of virtue. Morality was always a bed of Procrustes. Even the politicians have aped the preachers of virtue at this point: today too there are still parties whose dream it is that all things might walk backwards like crabs. But no one is free to be a crab. Nothing avails: one must go forward — step by step further into decadence (that is my definition of modern "progress"). One can check this development and thus dam up degeneration, gather it and make it more vehement and sudden: one can do no more." TWI "Skirmishes" 43; see also TWI "The Improvers of Mankind" 1

[45] BGE 200

Nietzsche repeats this same idea when he mentions that, at the point of the decay of an aristocratic order, precisely that time he calls "most fortunate" and most likely to produce high culture and philosophy, there arises a new type of morality, a late-stage morality of exhaustion:

> What will the moral philosophers who emerge at such a time now have to preach? They discover, these keen observers and street loafers, that things are quickly coming to an end, that everything around them is going rotten and spreading corruption, that nothing lasts until the day after tomorrow, except for one kind of person, the incurably mediocre. Only the mediocre have the prospect of succeeding, of reproducing themselves—they are the people of the future, the only survivors, "Be like them! Become mediocre!"—from now on that's the only morality that still makes sense, that people still hear.—But it is difficult to preach, this morality of mediocrity!—it may never admit what it is and what it wants! It must speak about restraint and worth and duty and love of one's neighbour—it will have difficulty concealing its irony![46]

He relates this condition—the condition of spiritual chaos and exhaustion, and the accompanying emergence of new moral notions that attempt to explain or manage this phenomenon—particularly to the Greek world of Socrates' time. Socrates cleverly saw the cause of the decadence of Greek life, and saw also his own case as the "cure":

> But Socrates guessed even more. He saw through the noble Athenians; he saw that his own case, his idiosyncrasy, was no longer exceptional. The same kind of degeneration was quietly developing everywhere: old Athens was coming to an end. And Socrates understood that the world needed him — his method, his cure, his personal artifice of self-preservation. Everywhere the instincts were in anarchy, everywhere one was within sight of excess: monstrum in animo was the common danger. "The impulses want to play the tyrant; one must invent a counter-tyrant who is stronger." After the physiognomist had revealed to Socrates who he was — a cave of bad appetites — the great master of irony let slip another clue to his character. "This is true," he said, "but I mastered them all." How did Socrates become master over himself? His case was, at bottom, merely the extreme case, only the most striking instance of what was then beginning to be a epidemic: no one was any longer master over himself, the instincts turned against themselves. He fascinated, being an extreme case; his awe inspiring ugliness proclaimed him as such to all who could see: he fascinated, of course, even more as an answer, a solution, an apparent cure for this disease. When one finds it necessary to turn reason into a tyrant, as Socrates did, the danger cannot be slight that something else threatens to play the tyrant. Rationality was hit upon as a savior; neither Socrates nor his "patients" had any choice about being rational: it was necessary, it was the last resort....[47]

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[46] BGE 262

[47] TWI, "The Problem of Socrates" 9-10

According to Nietzsche Platonism, Plato, corrupted by Socrates' plebeian moralism, picked up on this "cure." The "cure" was common to all the Socratic schools in that it consisted of moral philosophy, moral exhortation, the general purpose of which was to have a taming or calming effect through the application of reason. The purpose of Platonic moral philosophy then—and it must be emphasized that so far we are talking *only of its exoteric or public function*—was to bring order to the "anarchy" of the instincts, to try to reestablish virtue, inner order, on a new foundation. The older, surer foundation of aristocratic breeding and education, which formed *the instincts themselves* in a salutary direction, was now lacking—the instincts were at war with themselves. This new foundation was reason, through which therefore the philosopher as the man of reason, suitably decked out in a mask of piety, temperance, justice—supposedly now the opposite of the intemperate, lustful, criminal tyrant—becomes the guarantor or virtual priest of moral life and good citizenship. The philosopher becomes doctor of the soul to the Greeks; this was Plato's great achievement in finding a new foundation for the virtues on "reason," or rather, in finding a way to use reason to restrain and tame the "decadence of the instincts" that Greeks suffered from at the end of their culture. The philosopher's "ascetic mask" is the creation of Platonism, the wily and salutary public lie that was to guarantee the safety and even supremacy of the cause of philosophy in the Hellenistic and later Roman world.

Platonism was successful in its project in antiquity; the safety of the Socratic schools, as well as other philosophical schools, was assured through the end of Hellenistic (Roman) civilization. But an unforeseen historical development derailed

and warped the Platonic project. What Plato and his followers didn't count on was the emergence or eruption of an international missionary religion, based on revealed truth. The final result of the Christian project, which is also the final result—surely unintentional—of the Platonic project, is the misbreeding of modern European man. Christianity was "Platonism for the people," or, which is the same thing, an entirely exoteric Platonism. A Platonism with a priesthood that no longer understood nor cared for the fact that the outward moral and political orientation was meant as a protective outer wall for an inner garden where nature itself was nurtured and preserved. The quasi-Platonic priesthood of medieval Christianity, for all its spiritual profundity, was *incompetent* when it came to *the* needful task of caring for the "overall development" of man or the cultivation of human nature—a nature they denied:

> Finally, of course, to evaluate the opposing bad effects of such religions, as well, and to bring to light their sinister danger, there is always an expensive and fearful price to pay when religions prevail, not as a means of cultivation and education in the hand of philosophers, but as some inherently sovereign power, when religions want themselves to be the final purpose and not a means alongside other means...We have to thank them for something invaluable, and who is rich enough in gratitude not to become poor in the face of everything which, for example, the "spiritual men" of Christianity have done for Europe up to this point? And yet...what...they have done...amounts, in fact and truth, to the *deterioration of the European race...* ...Suppose we could survey with the mocking and disinterested eye of an Epicurean god the strangely painful comedy of European Christianity, as crude as it is refined, I believe we would find no end to our amazement and laughter. Does it not seem that for eighteen centuries there has been ruling over Europe a will to turn the human being into a sublime monstrosity? However, anyone who, with the opposite needs, no longer Epicurean, but with some divine hammer in his hand, were to approach this almost voluntary degeneration and decay of a human being, like the Christian European (Pascal, for example), would he not have to cry out with fury, pity, and horror, "You fools! You arrogant, pitying fools, what have you done here? Was that a work for your hands? What a mess you've made, ruining my most beautiful stone! What have you presumed?" What I wanted to say was this: Christianity has been the most disastrous sort of arrogance so far. Men not lofty and hard enough to be permitted to shape men as artists; men not strong and far-sighted enough to allow, with a sublime conquest of the self, the foreground law of thousand-fold failure and destruction to prevail; men not noble enough to see the abysmally different rank ordering, the gulfs separating ranks between man and man:—such men have, with their "equal before God," so far ruled over the fate of Europe to the point where finally a diminished, almost ridiculous type has been bred, a herd animal, something obliging, sickly, and mediocre—the contemporary European....[48]

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[48] BGE 62

The reference to Pascal is especially significant, and pointed: a sign that Nietzsche is saying philosophy and philosophers won't be possible in the new Europe. The Platonic project, founded to protect and preserve philosophy—this was the only purpose, ultimately, of Platonic moral teaching—ends up destroying, in the long run, the preconditions and therefore the possibility for philosophy.[49]

There are two reasons the Platonic moral project ultimately fails. One reason is "forgivable," if one may use moral language, in that it is incidental to Platonism: the coincidence of Christianity, a global, missionary religion is, again, not anticipated by Plato or by the Socratic schools. While it is true that Nietzsche famously calls Christianity "Platonism for the people," he also adds on various occasions that such "Platonism" serves a different purpose for the rabble than it did for the gentlemen and philosophical schools of antiquity. The motivation for an attraction to "otherworldliness," to a moral interpretation of the world, to asceticism, and so forth, is entirely different in the two cases.[50] Furthermore the failure of Platonism in this regard is in fact entirely separate from any substantial teaching or doctrine: as is apparent in the passage just quoted, the problem is when religion oversteps its bounds and becomes sovereign, as opposed to its being a useful tool of the statesman or the philosopher. This overreach, the possibility for this kind of priestly authority, is rooted in the peculiar origins of Christianity as a revealed religion and in the historical peculiarities of the late Roman world that adopted this new faith.

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[49] "...the political action of philosophers on behalf of philosophy has achieved full success. One sometimes wonders whether it has not been too successful." Strauss *On Tyranny* 207

[50] See the differing meanings of the ascetic ideal at GM 3

On this count then it can't be "blamed" on Platonism, however much the Socratic schools may have "laid the spiritual groundwork" for the later acceptance of clerical revealed religion.

But, one may speculate, there is a second reason that Platonism or the Platonic project ultimately fails, which is not incidental. This is the very "otherworldliness" or moralism itself—as long as one understands this problem in the right way. There is a lot written on Nietzsche's criticism of "otherworldliness" or asceticism in Plato or in Christianity, or his criticism of asceticism. One could even argue that Heidegger's criticism of the tradition of Western metaphysics stretching back to Plato is lifted entirely from Nietzsche, despite his deflection that Nietzsche was himself a representative of the most destructive branch of that tradition.[51] There is an attempt even—scholarly as well as on the part of popular writers—to make the case that Nietzsche's concern was on behalf of the cause of libertinism or "pleasure"; which would strangely turn Nietzsche's critique of Christianity itself into a moral condemnation and his program into a moralistic doctrine on behalf of moral or sexual "liberation"—you *should* carnally enjoy yourself, this time on principle, and as a matter of setting right historical wrongs. This way of reading Nietzsche has

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[51] This would be nothing new in the case of Heidegger. As Julian Young argues ["Schopenhauer, Heidegger, art, and the will" pp. 162-180 from *Schopenhauer, philosophy, and the arts* Ed.Dale Jacquette Cambridge U. 1996] nearly all of *Being and Time* corresponds to the first part of Schopenhauer's main work—Young almost calls it a plagiarism—which Heidegger attempts to cover up through the most intemperate attack on and criticism of Schopenhauer. Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, the great philosophical "outsiders" of the 19th century, who had such a profound effect on European literature and art, are recast into the rather more "difficult" academic language of the German professor, mingled with a late-stage Hegelianism, and put into the service of a national community and ultimately a state that Nietzsche and Schopenhauer both despised—few have more caustic words for nationalism and for the Germans in particular than Schopenhauer. While this is not the place for a criticism of Heidegger's thought, a rewarding study could be made of how there is in his books not a single substantial idea that is not already found in either Nietzsche or Schopenhauer. It represents an attempt to "square the circle" by turning these thinkers into court philosophers of sorts.

been especially successful in America. It entirely misses the point of Nietzsche's criticism both of Platonism and of Christianity.

According to Nietzsche Platonism was in a way quite *correct* to exhort a kind of asceticism. In times of decadence there is an "anarchy" of instincts, a tyranny of destructive and self-destructive impulses. Trusting one's own instincts, one's body, in such a situation is a grave mistake.[52] Restraint of the impulses is a necessity and a "cure," and Platonism was supremely crafty in its attempt to base this cure on "reason" and therefore to make the philosopher the spiritual patron or doctor of the ancient gentlemen—he repeatedly refers to Socrates as a "physician." This may not have been the truth as such, for the philosopher himself was secretly the most "decadent" type of this period. But it was an effective political truth that served an important public function—it was Socratism or tyranny by that point, there was no possibility of the restoration of the vitality of Archaic Greece, for the human material was there no longer. The Platonic mask of the philosopher, of philosophy's public function as guarantor of morality and good citizenship through the doctrine of reason, was then an effective *pia fraus,* a noble lie. Platonism's distrust of the senses, of "the body," instincts, was entirely justified in the historical circumstance in which Platonism found itself—and not only in that particular circumstance. It was entirely adequate as a means of perpetuating philosophy as a tradition once it already existed. The problem with Platonism's proscription of "the body," its spiritualization of nature—that is, its intellectualization and rationalization of the idea of nature—was that through this counterfeit actual knowledge of nature and of the body is

[52] TWI "The Problem of Socrates" especially 9, 11

eventually lost. In particular the truly needful knowledge—the knowledge Plato himself knew but which he hid—of the supremacy of the prerational over the rational and therefore of the *necessity of knowledge of breeding in statecraft,* was eventually lost. The existence of a regime, the Christian regime, that took the Platonic exoteric teaching more seriously and was able to enforce it more comprehensively than Plato himself could ever dream of, and to do so in a historical epoch for which it was fundamentally inappropriate, was something the Platonic project did not, and perhaps could not, account for. Let us remember that the Platonic teaching is profitable to a late-stage civilization and therefore entirely inappropriate to the cultural and spiritual life of barbarians who are just about to be civilized for the first time. In this case Platonic morality, as interpreted by Christianity, corrupts, stunts, misbreeds, *tames.* Nietzsche could not be clearer on this point:

> It is decisive for the lot of a people and of humanity that culture should begin in the right place — not in the "soul" (as was the fateful superstition of the priests and half-priests): the right place is the body, the gesture, the diet, physiology; the rest follows from that. Therefore the Greeks remain the first cultural event in history: they knew, they did, what was needed; and Christianity, which despised the body, has been the greatest misfortune of humanity so far.[53]

Plato himself was aware of the true meaning of nature as well as the necessity of training and especially breeding the appropriate pre-rational sentiments and orientations. He shows an awareness that this problem is coeval with the political problem and the problem of philosophy in the *Republic* when, in the process of constructing the regime that cultivates human nature at its peak,

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[53] TWI "Skirmishes" 47. It is for this reason that Nietzsche calls the French (Provencal-troubadour) spiritualization of sexual love—what he terms "love as passion"—and of woman one of the "greatest triumphs" of Europe over Christianity. Through this event nature, the body, the cultivation of eros could be re-introduced: France found a new basis on which human nature could once again be cultivated; it is for this reason that Nietzsche believes French culture is *the* modern European culture and that Europe possibly owes "everything" to the Provencal.

pride of place is given to a eugenic program. The Republic itself fails when the knowledge of breeding new generations is forgotten. In the best-case scenario, that is, that could only ever come about by chance, philosophy is the kingly art, the supreme political or architectonic art, because it is "knowledge of the soul," "erotic knowledge," knowledge of nature and therefore of the art of breeding. By contrast the Platonic moral philosophy is exoteric in that it is provisional and historically contingent: it is at best a successful emergency medical measure appropriate to late regimes and which, only with considerable deceit and distortion, manages to secure the place of philosophy in such regimes. Nietzsche is quite direct both on the matter of Plato's knowledge of the true meaning of nature and on his use of exotericism, or of the noble lie in covering up such knowledge.[54]

Ultimately the disagreement between Nietzsche and Plato is one of tactics, not of ultimate aims or even of general strategy. Nietzsche believes Plato's exoteric project, his "regime," his *pia fraus,* has by our time failed, in part for historical reasons that in no way represent a fundamental problem with the Platonic method. Nietzsche is quite explicit on Plato when it came to the *esoteric* meaning of the relationship between philosophy and the state. In an early essay on the Greek state, Nietzsche concludes with a reflection on the true meaning Plato's moral and political program that is most relevant for this chapter and indeed for this entire thesis. The inner purpose of the Platonic politics is "*the Olympian existence and ever-renewed*

[54] TWI "On the 'Improvers' of Mankind" 3-5; in the context in particular of talking about the morality of breeding as opposed to that of taming, Nietzsche mentions Plato and the *pia fraus* or noble lie and the problem of the psychology of those who use it as the problem he has been pursuing the longest.

*procreation and preparation of the genius*—compared with which all other things are only tools, expedients and factors towards realization."

Nietzsche's essay on the Greek state begins with a reflection on the self-serving but perhaps temporarily salutary lies that "we moderns" believe in as regards the "dignity of labor" and the "dignity of man."[55] The Greeks didn't believe in these because they didn't believe that mere life had any value. What Nietzsche calls the foundation of Greek knowledge is profoundly "nihilistic" from a modern point of view: it is the wisdom of Silenus. The Greek frankness regarding slavery is unacceptable to moderns: "we must accept the cruel sounding truth that slavery belongs to the essence of a culture: a truth, of course, that leaves no doubt as to the absolute value of existence." Absolute value of existence is nil, and man as such has no dignity and no value: mere life is repudiated by itself. Human nature doesn't exist in the state of nature: the human in the "state of nature" is a botched animal, a mistake of nature. Indeed there hasn't as yet been a natural humanity.[56] What has value is nobility, higher life, which requires the subsuming and exploitation of mere

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[55] The following discussion is based on "The Greek State," trans. Mugge, ed. Oscar Levy 1911; as so often in this thesis, I summarize Nietzsche's claims without adding repeatedly, "according to Nietzsche..."

[56] The primeval barbarian, who Nietzsche sometimes seems to praise, is nevertheless not the highest, or even a particularly high, form of human nature. Nietzsche merely calls the barbarian a more *complete* human than the vast majority of civilized humans, or humans living a settled life. But this has to do with the fact that the vast majority of attempts at civilization represent a mere stunting or taming of primeval barbarism, and not a cultivation of any higher forms of life. That is, civilization as such has no value insofar as it consists in the mere taming of the primeval barbarian or his reduction to a beast of burden. The barbarian at least represents potential, whereas the broken and civilized slave does not: or, as Strauss politely puts it, classical political philosophy has more interest in "rustic" early kingship than in forms of post-constitutional rule like Caesarism. The barbarian at least has energy and vitality, there is enough "raw material" there for cultivation of something higher. Domestication, by contrast, is corruption.

life, in the same way the Greek state and higher Greek culture required slavery,[57] and in the same way the *polis* required the absolute subsuming of all pre-political or subpolitical forms.

If the polis requires force for its existence; if the city or the closed aristocratic commonwealth is necessary for the development of high culture; and if, finally, human nature is actually fulfilled or reached, not in the "state of nature," which is generally just squalor and mere life, but in higher culture, then nature itself uses, not only slavery, but also more generally *force,* and *power* as a means, a circuitous means, to its own development or fulfillment. Much as a certain type of vegetation needs to use force, exploitation, parasitism, to ascend to the top of the canopy and therefore fulfill its nature while trampling on other vegetation—an image Nietzsche elsewhere and much later explicitly invokes precisely in this context.[58] Therefore if nature is made manifest in high culture, the brutality and force of the state is a necessary precondition, and the political instinct, the instinct for the state, is but a circuitous means that nature uses to reach her aims in secret: the *polis,* or a people, is nature's circuitous route to its manifestation, the production of high culture or of genius. Mankind then has an "instinct" for the state, whereby force and power "attracts" humans instinctively "as if by magic":

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[57] For sure Nietzsche maintains that the modern state also makes use of slavery. It is just that the Greeks were rather more honest in calling things what they were, whereas the moderns hide slavery under homilies of "dignity of labor."

[58] BGE 258 "Its fundamental belief must, in fact, be that the society should exist, not for the sake of the society, but only as a base and framework on which an exceptional kind of nature can raise itself to its higher function and, in general, to a higher form of being, comparable to those heliotropic climbing plants on Java—people call them sipo matador—whose tendrils clutch an oak tree so much and for so long until finally, high over the tree but supported by it, they can unfold their crowns in the open light and make a display of their happiness."

> Here again we see with what pitiless inflexibility Nature, in order to arrive at Society, forges for herself the cruel tool of the State-namely, that conqueror with the iron hand, who is nothing else than the objectivation of the instinct indicated. By the indefinable greatness and power of such conquerors the spectator feels, that they are only the means of an intention manifesting itself through them and yet hiding itself from them. The weaker forces attach themselves to them with such mysterious speed, and transform themselves so wonderfully, in the sudden swelling of that violent avalanche, under the charm of that creative kernel, into an affinity hitherto not existing, that it seems as if a magic will were emanating from them.

Man is a "political animal" in a very literal and direct way then: not merely in the sense of human nature being fulfilled in the *polis* but also from the other direction, nature achieves this end through an instinct that binds the lower classes to the growing power of the state precisely on account of its force, power, and violence. There is an instinct to be attracted to these—a chilling idea perhaps, and not one that ancient Socratic political philosophy would have discussed with such frankness at the very least. More disturbing still, Nietzsche believes that the state either exists or ceases to exist insofar as the possibility for war is present. "Through war and in the profession of arms is placed before our eyes an image, or even perhaps the prototype of the State." Originally conceived in war and for the purposes of waging war, the state as such, the "prototypical" state, the pure state such as Sparta, has as its internal program only one thing, the production of military genius:

> In the highest castes one perceives already a little more of what in this internal process is involved at the bottom, namely the creation of the military genius-with whom we have become acquainted as the original founder of states. In the case of many States, as, for example, in the Lycurgan constitution of Sparta, one can distinctly perceive the impress of that fundamental idea of the State, that of the creation of the military genius...

It is then entirely to this purpose that the Greek state is directed and therefore this purpose—the creation of military genius—is in some sense the original "intention" of nature. The "return to nature" is an "ascent to nature," to the

nature of the genius, originally of the military genius.[59] Human nature is "achieved" or manifested in the production of genius. The martial state, the Spartan state, is the prototype of the state: in its being dedicated to the production of military genius it lays the precondition, or presents the model, for the state as dedicated to the production of genius more generally, for the state as the cultivation of human nature or as the staging ground of higher culture. "The absolute man possesses neither dignity, nor rights, nor duties; only as a wholly determined being serving unconscious purposes can man excuse his existence." Man as such is matter or raw material for the work of the legislator or founder. Nietzsche ends the essay with a reflection, perhaps a shocking reflection, on the inner meaning of the Platonic project precisely in the preservation of this idea of the state. Plato "saw through" to the inner meaning of the Greek state and attempted to save or preserve its program precisely in its hour of decline. Or, in other words, Plato, at the moment of the decline of the Greek aristocracy, sought to abstract—to save and radicalize—the principle of the aristocratic regime. The inner or esoteric program of Platonism, on account of which the overt moral and political teaching is only a means, is the salvation or preservation of nature, or, to put it in other words, the "existence and ever-renewed procreation and preparation of the genius,"

Plato's perfect State is according to these considerations certainly something still greater than even the warm-blooded among his admirers believe, not to mention the smiling mien of superiority with which our " historically " educated refuse such a fruit of antiquity. The proper aim of the State, the

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[59] Strauss himself refers to Nietzsche's return to nature as an ascent to nature, but, significantly, doesn't at all touch on the example Nietzsche uses to make this point: "Progress in my sense. — I too speak of a 'return to nature,' although it is really not a going back but a going up — an ascent to the high, free, even terrible nature and naturalness where great tasks are something one plays with, one may play with. To put it metaphorically: Napoleon was a piece of 'return to nature,' as I understand the phrase (for example, in rebus tacticis; even more, as military men know, in matters of strategy). TWI "Skirmishes" 48

Olympian existence and ever-renewed procreation and preparation of the genius,-compared with which all other things are only tools, expedients and factors towards realisation-is here discovered with a poetic intuition and painted with firmness. Plato saw through the awfully devastated Herma of the then-existing State-life and perceived even then something divine in its interior. He believed that one might be able to take out this divine image and that the grim and barbarically distorted outside and shell did not belong to the essence of the State: the whole fervour and sublimity of his political passion threw itself upon this belief, upon that desire-and in the flames of this fire he perished. That in his perfect State he did not place at the head the genius in its general meaning, but only the genius of wisdom and of knowledge, that he altogether excluded the inspired artist from his State, that was a rigid consequence of the Socratian judgment on art, which Plato, struggling against himself, had made his own. This more external, almost incidental gap must not prevent our recognising **in the total conception of the Platonic State the wonderfully great hieroglyph of a profound and eternally to be interpreted esoteric doctrine of the connection between State and Genius.** What we believed we could divine of this cryptograph we have said in this preface.

That the Platonic *exoteric* program, influenced by Socratism, and necessarily limited by the political and social conditions of his time—conditions of dissolution, anarchy, and decay—overtly claims something rather different, and that on account of the limitations of this exoteric program the esoteric intention ultimately could not be carried through, is an entirely different matter. The aim in this and the previous chapter has been to make the case for why the Nietzschean reading of Plato can't be summarily dismissed—for why and how, indeed, the "esoteric" intention of Platonic political philosophy carries an awareness of the fundamental identity or at least close kinship, of tyranny and philosophy.

*Appendix: Nietzsche in the Strauss-Kojeve Debate on Tyranny and Philosophy*

Leo Strauss' essay *On Tyranny* and his subsequent discussion with Alexander Kojeve on the relationship of philosophy to state power can be interpreted alternately as a retort to or an elaboration of the ideas presented in the previous

sections of this chapter. Kojeve goes so far as to claim that the philosopher and the tyrant are the same. More interesting is the question of how far Strauss himself can be said to "agree" with the view just presented on Platonic political philosophy—with Nietzsche's view of the "esoteric" doctrine of Platonic political philosophy. A book on Strauss, not Nietzsche, would be necessary in order to answer this question with any certainty. I would like to suggest, however, that Strauss agrees with Nietzsche on the inner meaning of Platonism far more than is commonly acknowledged. Strauss' response to Kojeve, while not overtly or apparently a commentary on the Nietzschean claim regarding Platonism, is in fact a profound elaboration of the Nietzschean position.[60]

*a) Strauss on the problem of nature and history in Nietzsche*

Since much of the debate between Strauss and Kojeve hinges on the discussion of history and of the place of philosophy or nature in history, it is profitable to consider for a moment what Strauss has to say on Nietzsche's view of history. In his essay on Nietzsche in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* Strauss makes some remarks on Nietzsche's view of nature and of history that are either patent exaggerations—maybe even "lies"—or otherwise very mysterious. Strauss, while conceding that Nietzsche attacks historicism, nevertheless claims or appears to claim at one point that for Nietzsche history replaces nature. It is well-known that the common Straussian view—the view of many of Strauss' students at least—on Nietzsche is that he is in fact the most radical historicist, that he preserves the

[60] In this Appendix, works cited where the author is not specified should be assumed to be by Strauss.

historicist assumption about philosophy and nature. This is a view that is rightly based on many explicit statements Strauss himself makes about Nietzsche. Yet other statements Strauss makes seem to contradict this view, or at least to make the claims on Nietzsche's supposed historicism very unclear—in particular, when Strauss quotes Nietzsche on his belief in a certain kind of "return to nature," or "ascent to nature," and when he ends the essay in question with the mysterious phrase *Die vornehme Natur ersetzt die gottliche Natur.* But in what sense does a historicist speak of *vornehme Natur,* of noble nature, of human nature as any kind of standard at all? Strauss' essay on Nietzsche ends with nature, not with history. What is Strauss trying to say?

A cursory glance at Nietzsche's statements on nature quoted in this chapter alone shows that, if he was a historicist, he was a strange kind of historicist indeed. In fact he was not a historicist in any way. If the fundamental historicist insight is that all thought is historically relative, limited to its own horizon, that there is no transhistorical truth, then it is difficult to see how Nietzsche says many of the things he is shown to say above—including what he says about how he is able to divine the cryptographic teaching of Plato regarding the esoteric relationship between the State and culture or the State and genius. Which, Nietzsche makes clear, still holds in his own time. Nietzsche goes so far as to dismiss historicism—the *milieu* theory—as a neurotic's prejudice.[61] He emphasizes that there is a fundamental disconnect between men like Alcibiades and da Vinci and their own times—they are not men determined by their own time, they represent or embody something older and

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[61] TWI "Skirmishes" 44

stronger that is in some sense "out of place" in its own time and can therefore overcome an age of decadence. While this same age of decadence is in an indirect way the "cause" or the opportunity both for the emergence of Alcibiades and of his weaker and decadent contemporaries, Alcibiades is not determined by these or by their horizon in his life or action, let alone in his thought.[62] So far then from Nietzsche believing that thought or philosophy is determined or limited by the historical horizon, he doesn't believe that this historical horizon limits even the way of life or the opportunities for action; the time doesn't even limit or determine great statesmen or adventurers—let alone the content of the thought of someone like Plato.

Precisely in discussing the aphorism on Caesar and Alcibiades Strauss seems to point to Nietzsche's fundamentally anti-historicist message.

> Prior to the victory of the democratic movement to which, as Nietzsche understands it, also the anarchists and socialists belong, moralities other and higher than the herd morality were at least known. He mentions with high praise Napoleon and, above all, Alcibiades and Caesar. He could not have shown his freedom from the herd morality more tellingly than by mentioning in one breath Caesar and Alcibiades. Caesar could be said to have performed a great, historic function for Rome and to have dedicated himself to that function-to have been, as it were, a functionary of Roman history, but for Alcibiades Athens was no more than the pedestal, exchangeable if need be with Sparta or Persia, for his own glory or greatness.[63]

Strauss mentions Alcibiades' using of the Spartan or Persian regimes, with apparent ease, as stepping stones in the pursuit of his own glory or greatness. But how is Alcibiades able to do this? Nietzsche doesn't mention this particular ability of Alcibiades' in the passage that Strauss describes, nor his moving from one regime to

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[62] "Great men are necessary, the age in which they appear is accidental; that they almost always become masters over their age is only because they are stronger, because they are older, because for a longer time much was gathered for them. The relationship between a genius and his age is like that between strong and weak, or between old and young: the age is relatively always much younger, thinner, more immature, less assured, more childish." TWI 44

[63] SPPP 184

another. It is Strauss who therefore emphasizes Alcibiades' "regime independence," his ability to transcend regime and convention and therefore make use of a variety of regimes. This versatility and ability to live in and make use of a variety of regimes has been shown, in the previous chapter, to be a point of pride of some of the less discreet Socratics. Strauss therefore attributes to Alcibiades even more explicitly than Nietzsche does a freedom, not just from "herd morality" in the abstract, but from the historical horizon of his own regime. In fact, although Strauss pretends that Nietzsche is talking about "herd morality" here, Nietzsche nowhere mentions herd morality in this aphorism at least. What Nietzsche does talk about, quite explicitly, is breeding—he specifically mentions mixing of blood—*a topic Strauss pointedly does not touch upon.* Strauss, in elaborating on Alcibiades' peculiar talents and explaining why Nietzsche chose Alcibiades as an example, points emphatically to Nietzsche's criticism of historicism at the same time—on the same page—that he appears to claim that Nietzsche replaces nature with history. But it is precisely Alcibiades' superior nature, according to Nietzsche, that made him overcome his time and entirely free himself from the horizon of his own regime. Strauss' elaboration on Alcibiades' career helps Nietzsche's own claim, and does not support Strauss' overt criticism of Nietzsche as a "historicist."

To understand why Strauss may be doing this, let us tunnel for a moment into Nietzsche's conception of nature. The historicist claim is essentially that human nature doesn't exist. If human nature existed, then there would be access to a transhistorical and substantial truth about human life. To be a historicist and believe that all thought and all life is limited by the historical horizon is to believe in

the malleability of the human species to a high or almost infinite degree: custom or convention or the political regime conditions human thought and action at every level, or at least at all significant levels.

Now, it should be clear from what has been said above that this is very far from Nietzsche's view. The fact that Nietzsche believes human nature is amenable to cultivation, that is, to *breeding* (or to taming and corruption), and therefore to limited change in particular directions, doesn't mean that Nietzsche denies human nature or that he subsumes it to "history." It means he has a realistic, that is, a naturalistic, view of human nature. To talk about human nature means to be able to consider man one of the animals—something that classical philosophy, including Socratic philosophy, emphatically did. But then one must admit that humans can be bred just like animals can be bred—no one would say that a dog breeder "denies dog nature" because he studies dog breeds and methods of breeding, and knows that therefore dog nature is not homogenous, that, within certain bounds, it varies from breed to breed, that it changes in certain ways over time; or who could say that a trainer of horses denies horse nature? Rather these are the keenest observers and students of the nature of these animals. Strauss certainly knew of the intense and keen interest of the ancient gentleman in the matter of breeding dogs and horses—he points to Xenophon's texts on such matters[64]—and knew for sure also of the ancient tendency to understand human nature in an analogous way. I do not see by what reasoning one claims that to believe in human nature, or even in nature as a standard of judgment, one has to believe in a completely *unchanging* nature that

[64] Strauss *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* p. 132 and connects precisely his writing on the training of dogs and horses to his Socratic writings on politics.

exists in the abstract and is entirely intellectualized, or that is entirely homogenous. This may be a Godly nature—these are the words Strauss uses at the end of the Nietzsche essay—but it is not human nature in practice, nor the nature of any animal we know of. Supposedly in the middle of claiming that Nietzsche replaces nature with history, Strauss references an aphorism from *Beyond Good and Evil* (213) wherein Nietzsche doesn't even mention history; he mentions instead, blood and breeding. In particular, the necessity for inherited virtues. However much one may twist that very carnal and literal conception of nature into a "historicization of nature"—by which rights Pindar and Plato as well would be historicists—such a serious claim, if meant in earnest, surely can't be left as-is without any argument or elaboration.

The low or ignominious origin of the state or of the aristocratic commonwealth in barbarism and conquest doesn't negate either the nobility of the virtues that are later cultivated, nor the fact that they are natural—indeed Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes that they are natural, *a matter of blood and body, of physical gesture even.* Much commentary on Nietzsche twists itself into convoluted arguments to make the claim that Nietzsche attempts to replace the standard of nature with some other standard—whether history or the Eternal Return or the past—either because it does not see or does not want to talk about Nietzsche's actual thoughts on nature.

It may finally be argued that, even if Nietzsche believes that human nature exists, he is still a historicist because he evidently believes human nature is changeable. And if human nature is changeable it therefore cannot function as a

"standard"; the virtues that Nietzsche seems to value then, including nobility as such, are a product of "history" and therefore Nietzsche is a historicist because his standard is drawn from history. There is no fixed or natural standard that can function as a goal of human aspiration and cultivation. The goal appears to be a historical accident and a matter, at best, of human decision. This is, again, as if someone claimed a horse or dog breeder, or someone who believes in natural and artificial selection, is a "historicist." Such a claim overstates the degree of Nietzsche's supposed belief in changeability, and it overstates the degree also to which the excellences or virtues are said to be "accidents." In fact Nietzsche does not call them accidents, he merely points to their "ignominious" origins in barbarism and cruelty—but for Nietzsche this is not a moral condemnation. The horse breeder and trainer is able to understand the way and degree to which a horse's nature is "changeable" or, more accurately, the degree to which it can be improved: the particular excellences possible for a horse are apparent even in the mediocre or unenhanced varieties with which the breeder might have to begin. These excellences that are pursued in a breeding program are not a matter of "decision" in the sense that is meant by a critique of Nietzsche as a "historicist"; this is why a breeder does generally not try to breed a horse with the particular excellences of a dog, or vice versa. It would seem that the criticism of Nietzsche as a historicist is based on an understanding of nature that denies or would like not to talk about observable nature.

More important—especially for understanding Strauss' own elaboration in his discussion with Kojeve—the criticism of Nietzsche as a historicist on account of

his belief in the "changeability" or the variability of human nature, or the way in which standards are supposedly drawn "from history," overlooks the specific way in which he believes such change takes place. He repeatedly speaks, as we have seen, about the misbreeding of modern Europeans on account of the medieval clerisy's lack of knowledge of human nature, of the body. At another point he speaks of the "improvers of mankind" as those who used techniques of breeding and taming, and employed the weapon of the noble lie, to improve the human specimen. At other times he emphasizes the ambition of philosophers, like Plato, to be legislators, and he repeatedly speaks of the founders of peoples in the same language that previous philosophers from Aristotle to Rousseau had used about the legislator.[65] In other words, much of the historical change Nietzsche speaks of originates in the minds of founders of peoples or of great legislators. This is quite different from what is normally meant by historicism, which assumes change on account of impersonal "forces"—economic, technological, linguistic, and so forth—and which normally assumes that the emergence of a people is in a bottom-up "organic" process rather than in the political work of a great founder. The founders are necessarily not determined by their time, but determine the horizon of a people; they stand outside this horizon and have nature as a guide much in the same way a horse breeder does. The legislator is the "greatest artist," and human nature is his material; he is as such limited by what he can achieve with that material. The origin of apparent variability in human nature, of the variety of virtues and excellences in the behavior of different peoples or historical castes, is not just chance or history, and not the

[65] Rousseau himself seems to talk about the pia fraus in his chapter on the Legislator from book II of *Social Contract*

product of emergent impersonal forces, but the deliberate work of "founders of peoples," who therefore had to possess knowledge of human nature and use it as a standard while working with the material they actually had. Whatever this may be, it is not a "historicist" position, nor one that replaces nature with history as a standard.

It is to be supposed that Leo Strauss is aware of Nietzsche's thoughts on nature, but does not want, maybe for good reason, to openly talk about them. He is, however content to hint. The last line in Strauss' strange essay on Nietzsche is on the *vornehme Natur.* This is often translated as "noble nature"—the title of the chapter Strauss is talking about is "What is Noble"—but Strauss goes out of his way to emphasize that Nietzsche uses for "noble" the word *vornehme* and not simply "noble."[66] Strauss never really explains in English why Nietzsche uses this word; he only hints that it is because "it is inseparable from extraction, origin, birth." Strauss therefore plays the same double joke: he encourages most of his readers to see Nietzsche as a "historicist"; for, after all, isn't the mistake of the historicist that he confuses a phenomenon for its origin and its beginnings? And yet the last word—birth—points emphatically to nature, nature in even a literal or crude sense, as Nietzsche understands it. The *vornehme* is the word for well-born: it is a form of the word "noble" that points, not to "origin" in the abstract, but to nature and the noble as biological *breeding.* If Strauss had discussed this matter openly, if he had attempted to refute Nietzsche on this one matter openly, then one could say that his criticism of Nietzsche, such as it is said to be, was comprehensive or at least genuine.

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[66] SPPP 190-1

But to repeatedly avoid this problem, when it is so central to Nietzsche's understanding of nature, is a very strong suggestion that Strauss is pointing here to something he'd rather not discuss but that is nevertheless of the greatest import. Nietzsche's resurrection of the ancient Greek conception of nature is, I would claim, entirely genuine and not based on historicist assumptions. It is the resurrection of the ancient idea of nature, the ancient idea of the legislator, together with an explanation for why Platonism had somewhat to "edit" and mask this idea as part of its exoteric moral and political program. Strauss pretends that Nietzsche is a historicist, but the telling part is that he avoids talking about the core of Nietzsche's actual ideas on nature while hinting at them. Strauss' last word on Nietzsche is, in German, *vornehme Natur*—well-born nature, begotten nature, bred nature.

*b) Strauss vs. Kojeve on nature and history*

A similar pattern holds when we look at Leo Strauss' debate and correspondence with the Hegelian Alexander Kojeve in *On Tyranny.* Strauss and Kojeve, beginning from an analysis on Xenophon's *Hiero,* talk about philosophy and the problem of tyranny. Much of the discussion turns on the position of philosophy and therefore on the problem of human nature in society and history. Let us consider briefly Kojeve's main argument and Strauss' response to it. In fact Kojeve explicitly at one point claims that the philosopher and the tyrant are one and the same.

With some simplification, the main argument Kojeve makes is that philosophy only has history, material history, as the surety of its search for truth.

Carried out in private, philosophy is not only ineffective, but deprives the philosopher of the opportunity to test the truth of his conclusions, and therefore to distinguish philosophy from madness. Carried out in any type of "cloistered" group, among an elite for example, erases the danger of descent into madness, but nevertheless still does not make for philosophy: like a true historicist Kojeve essentially claims that the truth is that which unfolds in the history of a society or in the history of mankind as such; that what is true at one time may not be true at another, and that therefore any philosophical elite or sect that does not interact with political society or large or attempt to test its ideas in the course of history will study at most an obsolete or ahistorical "truth," and therefore not a truth at all. Since both private and "elite" philosophizing is as such impossible, this leaves only one option: philosophy can only be true philosophy when it is public, when it is politically powerful and effective. It is only as a public and universal educational enterprise that philosophy can affect history and therefore "test out" its truths: history and society are the "laboratory," so to speak, the surety of philosophical investigation.

Such a public philosophy is necessarily indistinguishable from political power, even tyrannical political power. The true philosopher seeks political power or access to it in order to put his ideas into practice. He is driven to this task by the desire for recognition: the desire for the broadest possible recognition is not distinguishable from philosophy as the search for truth. The philosopher and the tyrant are ultimately the same because their function is indistinguishable from the desire for recognition, a desire that can only be satisfied by the broadest possible

recognition, if not universal recognition; a recognition that, in both cases, can only be achieved by political power, if not absolute political power.

Strauss, in opposition to Kojeve, holds to what Kojeve somewhat caustically describes as the "ancient tradition" of philosophy. Strauss speaks of human nature, which Kojeve, as a historicist, denies: humans, as opposed to animals, have no fixed nature. In a letter to Strauss, Kojeve says the following, maybe with the intention, half tongue-in-cheek, to provoke:

> ...I can only keep repeating the same thing. If there is something like "human nature," then you are surely right in everything. But to deduce from premises is not the same thing as to prove these premises. And to infer premises from (anyway questionable) consequences is always dangerous. Your Bible quote about the land of the fathers is already most problematic. From it one can of course deduce a condemnation of collectivization in the USSR and elsewhere. But with it one also justifies permanently preserving a Chinese peasant's animal-like starvation-existence (before Mao-Tse-Tung). Etc. etc.
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> But all this is hardly philosophy. The task of philosophy is to resolve the fundamental question regarding "human nature." And in that connection the question arises whether there is not a contradiction between speaking about "ethics" and "ought" on one hand, and about conforming to a "given" or "innate" human nature on the other. For animals, which unquestionably have such a nature, are not morally "good" or "evil," but at most healthy or sick, wild or trained. One might conclude that it is therefore precisely ancient anthropology that would lead to mass-training and eugenics.[67]

Kojeve in his actual essay connects this "ancient anthropology" and ancient philosophy precisely with what he terms an "aristocratic prejudice" and accuses Strauss of sharing the "aristocratic prejudice" of ancient philosophy. In talking of the ancient tendency of philosophical sects to "withdraw" into a small "elite" that excludes the "uninitiated," Kojeve outright says that,

> Here again Strauss seems to follow Xenophon (who conforms to the ancient tradition) and to justify this kind of behavior. The wise man, he says, "is satisfied with the approval of a small minority." He seeks only the approval of those who are "worthy," and this can only be a very small number. The philosopher will therefore have recourse to *esoteric* (preferably oral) instruction, which permits him, among other things, to select the "best" and eliminate those "of limited capacity" who are incapable of understanding hidden allusions and tacit implications. I must say that here again I differ from Strauss

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[67] OT 262

and the ancient tradition he would like to follow, which, in my opinion, rests on an aristocratic *prejudice* (perhaps characteristic of a *conquering* people).[68]

In these two passages, Kojeve all but accuses Strauss of sharing precisely the Nietzschean view I have tried to explain in this chapter. Ancient philosophy, especially in its educational and public practices, rests on an "aristocratic prejudice" characteristic of a "conquering people"; Kojeve explicitly connects the origin of ancient philosophy (of which he does not approve) to an act of primitive conquest and therefore the exploitation of a subject people. The philosophical practice of esotericism, and the very idea of the philosophical school in search for truth outside the city is connected by Kojeve not only with the exclusivity of aristocracy, but with its violence. The "anthropology" of this ancient philosophy based on "aristocratic prejudice" is precisely what leads to "mass training" and "eugenics"—Kojeve here uses markedly Nietzschean language and imagery. He says the problem, given the ancient conception of nature, is not of good or evil, but of "healthy or sick, wild or trained." This is Nietzschean language.[69] The element that connects the two is the standard of nature or teaching of nature, which is "the fundamental question" for

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[68] OT 154

[69] As much as, indeed, the words Massendressur and Volkshygiene allude to Nazi practice, according to Gourevitch; it's unclear if Kojeve was being humorous or trying to bait Strauss in the letter in question. Regardless, Strauss, as we have seen, carefully avoids explicitly treating this subject even when he quotes Nietzschean aphorisms that treat the problem of breeding explicitly. It is unclear why Strauss does so, and a good subject for future investigation. As to Nietzsche's supposed connections to Nazism, Strauss' formulation—the step-grandfather of fascism—is adequate. Note, however, that fascism is not the same as Nazism. The connection between Nietzsche and fascism is tenuous and indirect at best, but the connection to Nazism is next to impossible to make. This is not an apologia on behalf of Nietzsche, however, so this subject must be left for later. Walter Kaufmann in any case has adequately disproven any connection between Nietzsche's teaching and Nazism, see his *Nietzsche* 1975 chapter 10. It suffices to mention the chapter titled "The Coldest Monster" from *Zarathustra* alone to see, in a very direct way, why Nietzschean talk of "breeding" does not entail any connection to Nazi ideology. The Nietzscheans who lived in the 1930's were men of the right—Ernst Junger and Stefan George come to mind—but they were also resolutely anti-Nazi. Junger's *On Marble Cliffs,* written in 1939, is often taken to be a Nietzschean criticism of Hitlerism. Stefan George left Germany in 1933; members of his Nietzschean secret society tried to assassinate Hitler.

the task of philosophy. If nothing else, then Kojeve at least seems aware that, prior to Strauss, Nietzsche made entirely similar claims regarding the relationship between nature, philosophy, esotericism, and in turn of these to the state and to society.

Strauss does not answer the provocation; he nowhere answers Kojeve on either of these two points, nor does he directly address Nietzsche on the dark roots or primitive preconditions for the philosophical life. Strauss speaks resolutely and single-mindedly of this philosophical life, and not of its precondition. In closing it may be profitable to consider one point where Strauss, in trying to refute Kojeve, says,

> ...the philosopher as such is concerned with nothing but the quest for wisdom and kindling or nourishing the love of wisdom in those who are by nature capable of it...insofar as the philosopher...becomes concerned with being recognized by others, he ceases to be a philosopher...the concern with recognition detracts from the singleness of purpose which is characteristic of the philosopher. It blurs his vision. This fact is not at variance with the other fact that high ambition is frequently a sign by which one can recognize the potential philosopher. But to the extent to which high ambition is not transformed into full devotion to the quest for wisdom, and to the pleasures which accompany that quest, he will not become an actual philosopher.[70]

Expressed in reasonable and calm language, this is nevertheless entirely in keeping with Nietzsche's own opinions on the relationship between the philosopher and the world—the emphasis on the *singleness of purpose* is telling—and also Plato's words on the potential philosopher at *Republic* 491a ff ; the word used, again, for the nature of the potential philosopher is the *erromenesteros,* a vehement and overweening nature, and the same nature that, if corrupted, will become the tyrant. That Strauss, unlike Nietzsche, chooses not to tunnel into this phenomenon, or at least not to expose the effects of his tunneling to others, that he chooses not to pry

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further into what is necessary that there may exist those who are "by nature capable" of receiving the joys of philosophy—that, perhaps, he trusts in the innocence and copiousness of nature to provide for what is needful—may be a result of that famous Straussian discretion, the Xenophontic or Austen-ian sense that "it is noble to remember the good." And this Straussian turn, at least as a matter of rhetoric, may have something to do with the perceived failure of Nietzsche's own exoteric project. Nietzsche's hopes for a revival of the arts and of philosophy appear, after all, to have been thwarted. Strauss' departure from the Nietzschean defense of philosophy may, in the end, also have something to do with Strauss' explicitly and perhaps strictly educational enterprise—on account of which an overemphasis on the "preconditions" of philosophy, not to speak of its brutal or dark beginnings, would actually take away from the display of the practice of philosophy, a display that serves as such the function of enticement or seduction to philosophy. One is left to wonder, however, in light of the failure of the last-ditch Nietzschean project of revitalization—to what extent Strauss himself believed a revival of philosophy as such was possible in the modern world. For, as he makes clear in his exchange with Kojeve, he is well aware that there will *be no philosophy* in the universal and homogenous state, or in anything like such a state. There are, after all, preconditions for philosophy to exist and therefore also limits to the emergence of the philosophical nature.

## CONCLUSION

The chief intention of this study has been to offer an explanation for why the ancient city perceived philosophers as dangerous and as associated with tyrants—to argue that there was *something* to the ancient prejudice that philosophy was associated with tyranny. I believe I have more than established that the ancient city, for all its primitive obscurantism, at least *had a point* in suspecting philosophy of associations with tyranny and with criminal political doctrines. For it is immaterial from the point of view of political life understood in the ancient sense whether philosophy merely *risks* or actually *intends* the production of tyrants.

In attempting to establish the reasonableness of the ancient judgment regarding tyranny and philosophy, a subordinate task has been to provide an alternative history for the emergence of both tyranny and political philosophy—alternative, that is, both to the classical view and to the modern restatement of the classical view as appears in the books of Leo Strauss. Since tyranny, or at least philosophy, is acknowledged to have the idea of nature as *the* indispensible precondition for its emergence, the thesis has therefore focused on the origin of the idea of nature. And it has been part of the task here to find this origin in the way of life, *mores,* or standard underlying aristocratic regimes, and in subsequent intellectual refinements of this standard. At the most general level this approach can be described as an attempt to replay Nietzsche's reading of antiquity, to find the ancient sources for Nietzsche's understanding of the origins of philosophy, and to understand Nietzsche's political thought as such. But in the process of trying to

think through Nietzsche's political claims and read his sources—one can only hope that some justice has been done to the remarkable depth of his teaching—some novel contributions have, I believe, been made.

First of all, the thesis has connected two separate claims—on one hand the claim, by Nietzsche, that philosophy (and tyranny) has its origin in a decaying aristocratic regime; on the other the claim, by Strauss and by classical political philosophy, that philosophy has the idea of *nature* as its indispensible precondition. The link between these claims has been to read the origin of nature in what Nietzsche calls the breeding and training practices of the aristocratic regime. The idea of nature and ultimately philosophy itself is argued then, through Nietzsche, to arise out of a primitive understanding of nature as breeding or biology. Accordingly a second and closely related contribution of this thesis is a novel reading of Pindar: the concept of nature is seen to have its origin in the political regime of Archaic Greek aristocracy, and indeed to represent an abstraction or "distillation" of the standard underlying the aristocratic regime. In this context an entirely new reading of Plato is also offered—a "Nietzschean" reading as an alternative, not only to contemporary academic readings of Plato and of the *Gorgias,* but to the Straussian account of the intention behind Plato's esotericism. Platonic exotericism is understood to be a protective armor that, however, hides and protects a Calliclean conception of nature and of the place of the philosopher in political society.

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